













*By the same author*

LANDMARKS OF MODERN STRATEGY (*Methuen*)

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# **Hitler's GENERALS**

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TO JEAN ROTHWELL

# Colonel General Baron Werner von Fritsch

*He who sups with the devil needs a  
long spoon. OLD ENGLISH PROVERB*

Von Fritsch, typical of his class, was of medium height, heavily built, square-faced and always wore a monocle. Although his intelligence was undoubted and his energy untiring, he was too consciously arrogant to be impressive. He lacked that imagination and foresight which might have enabled him to avoid his violent though not ignoble end.

To those under his command he was frigid and remote in his superiority, and before N.C.O.s and men he never relaxed the dignity of his rank and position for a moment. To civilians he adopted two methods of approach. If a man was of no use to him then he was of less significance than the humblest private: the very presence of such a complete nonentity in the scheme of things was an annoyance to him. The private, the N.C.O. and the junior officer, though without interest to him as individuals, were at least units in the great military machine which bound him and them together. The civilian was always beyond the pale.

But to the man he wished to make use of, von Fritsch was at once the grandseigneur. To him this was diplomacy, and when it seemed worth while to play the part he could say: 'We are *all* gentlemen, after all. Now let's talk to each other like that.' Of course, as a Prussian general (or, as one might have thought from his manner, a demigod among mortals), he could hardly be friendly; but he could stoop so far as to be benevolent, and his tricks when in this mood soon grew familiar to those who had dealings with him.

He could expose a human side of himself by pretending to have been 'a naughty boy'—not without some foundation—and he could be confidential, too, and relate little anecdotes that were not fit for the drawing-room, believing that he was thus creating an atmosphere of trust without himself giving anything away. This done,

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he would then reveal his original motive, and the man who had been 'taken into his confidence' was expected to tell all he knew or to do whatever was wanted of him. To von Fritsch this kind of thing was 'trying one's charm on somebody'.

But if the victim was neither overawed nor dazzled, as could happen occasionally, even in Germany, then all vestige of dignity disappeared and common rudeness took its place. That, however, was very rare, for the German, unlike the Englishman, is brought up to stand in dread of his superiors.

Werner von Fritsch was born on the 4th August 1880, at Benrath in the district of Düsseldorf in the Rhineland, a son of the retired Lieut.-General Baron Georg von Fritsch and his wife Adelheid (née von Bodelschwingh). The father's pension allowed the boy a good education at the grammar schools at Düsseldorf, Posen and Hanau. His mother's family were pillars of the Evangelical Church in Germany; they were philanthropists, and had founded a home for cripples and epileptics that was known all over the country; and their influence was certainly a powerful element in the moulding of the young man's character.

Religious education at that time was commonly part of the curriculum of any cadet who intended becoming an officer in the Imperial German Army, but contact with the Church was often not much more than a matter of good form. With Werner von Fritsch this side of his education went deeper, and later on was to dictate his conduct at critical moments of his career.

On 21st September 1898, he joined the Grand-Ducal Hessian Field Artillery Regiment No. 25 at Darmstadt. The elder von Fritsch, who was a nobleman of standing, had commanded the aristocratic 15th Cavalry Brigade, and the family was substantial financially, so that Werner could have entered any crack Guards regiment of the Imperial German Army. But he preferred an artillery regiment, thus taking almost the only opportunity inside the German Army of that time of acquiring technical knowledge. During the latter years of the nineteenth century there had been rapid development of the artillery arm.

By 1900 he was a second lieutenant, nine years later a full lieutenant. But he had caught the attention of his regimental chief in 1907, and in the autumn of that year was transferred to the

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He was becoming increasingly conscious of the political influences that governed the general direction of the German armed forces at their headquarters and which impinged on the mind of every ambitious officer. He had gained a deep inside knowledge of many of the larger aims of the German Government, the Supreme Command and the General Staff; and throughout the war while a General Staff officer he had found a most able coach in Colonel Max Bauer, known in General Staff circles as 'the shadow behind Ludendorff'. Bauer, like von Fritsch, was an artillery specialist, professionally concerned with the technical development of the army, but his interests went beyond that. He headed many conferences on war economy, showed von Fritsch how to handle politicians; and later, during his career in the Reichswehr, von Fritsch was to speak of him as his teacher in matters other than strategy.

At the conclusion of the Armistice von Fritsch joined the 4th Reserve Corps, which, under the command of General Count Rüdiger von der Goltz, carried on the war in the Baltic provinces. He became Chief of the General Staff of the Corps, which was made up from remnants of the élite of the old Imperial Army. The operations carried out by von der Goltz would have been impossible without the collaboration of the Socialist War Minister of the Republic, Noske—an association between an aristocratic general and a former Socialist firebrand which von Fritsch would have thought out of the question until a few months earlier—and he was not long in forming the opinion that there was hope for the re-establishment of a limited armed national force. At many conferences between Noske's emissaries and the leaders of the 4th Reserve Corps he saw in practice how even a Left minister put the interests of the army before his professed political principles.

The Inter-Allied Commission in the Baltic States, headed by the French General Niessel, put an end to the semi-private, semi-official existence of the Corps. Niessel met von Fritsch, and in his book\* he describes a meeting between the Staff of the 4th Reserve Corps, then under the command of General von Eberhardt, who was Commander-in-Chief of the 7th Army during the World War, and the Allied Commission.

\* *L'Evacuation des Pays Baltique par les Allemands—Contribution à l'étude de la mentalité Allemande.* (Ed. Charles Lavanzelles, Paris, Limoges, Nancy, 1935).

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General Niessel writes: 'His Chief of Staff, Major von Fritsch, is young, arrogant and extremely self-confident. It seems he has no qualms about playing a hide-and-seek game with truth or evading uncomfortable questions and misleading the Allied Commission. He has all the professional advantages and all the faults of character of the Prussian General Staff officer, who frequently considers himself superior—and rightly too—to the ordinary mortal.' Niessel further complains that certain figures of the strength of the Corps were proved false, and had no hesitation in saying so at one of the meetings held.

Service in the 4th Reserve Corps in the Baltic provinces did not as a rule mean advancement for its officers because it was not a military body which was fully recognised officially in Germany. Nevertheless von Fritsch's services were rewarded by a transfer of short duration to the Reserve Group Command No. 3, and in 1920 he began the two years' task of building up the organisation of the comparatively new Reichswehr Ministry.

Here he had his first contact with the Commander-in-Chief of the young Reichswehr, General Hans von Seeckt, who was impressed by his wide knowledge and resourcefulness and with his patience and unswerving concentration. In 1922 he received his first full command and took over the 2nd Battery of the Artillery Regiment No. 5 in Ulm in Bavaria. He was gazetted a lieutenant-colonel in February 1923, but his patent dated back from the 15th November 1922, a ruse contrived by his friends in the Reichswehr Ministry to enable him to meet debts incurred by his lavish way of living in Berlin.

Transferred for several years to the 1st Division in Königsberg in East Prussia as Chief of Staff, von Fritsch studied the military questions of eastern Germany as created by the new frontier line with Poland, not, we may suppose, without some thought for the future. From this staff appointment he returned in 1927 to the Reichswehr Ministry as colonel and 'departmental chief'. Actually he joined the camouflaged General Staff of the Reichswehr, which was prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles. He worked under the direction of another General Staff officer, von Blomberg, but von Blomberg was not a man of energetic mind, his character having perhaps more charm than strength, and von Fritsch in effect replaced him.

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On taking up this office he inherited a number of difficulties calling for solution. Questions had been raised in the Reichstag by Socialist and Democratic deputies who were not satisfied with the reports given them by the Reichswehr Minister, Dr. Gessler, regarding the budget estimates for the Army and Navy. In February 1926 Stücklen, Socialist Deputy and reporter for the Budget Committee of the Reichstag on Army and Navy estimates, put forward these questions:

(1) Why has the budget increased by 30 million marks though the number of men and the strength of the Reichswehr remain the same?

(2) Why has an army of 100,000 men to be scattered over 127 garrisons?

(3) Why does the Reichswehr still list 40,212 horses, though only 10,000 men belong to cavalry regiments?

(4) Why are funds 'transferable'? (48 per cent of the 1927 budget for the Army and Navy was 'transferable', that is, able to be transferred from one branch of the army to another at the discretion of the army command.)

(5) Why does the Reichswehr Ministry— which has never shown any signs of economy—refuse to enlist the services of a political under-secretary? (Stücklen himself gave the answer to this: because it relieves the generals of the compulsion of a supervisor, and without such an officer the entire Reichswehr is relieved of compulsion to answer any uncomfortable political questions.)

But Stücklen went further than this. He confronted the Reichswehr Ministry with concrete facts showing that the General Staff Officers in the Ministry had completely disregarded their obligations to the Government and were consistently lying to the representatives of the German Republic. He used information that in a rough form had been published by the Silesian newspaper *Breslauer Volkswacht*, a Socialist organ that represented the views of the President (the Speaker) of the Reichstag, Loebe. Stücklen had investigated an accusation made by this paper and found out that, contrary to the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles and officially unrecognised by the Reichswehr, there existed forty 'district officers' in Lower Silesia who had been ordered to push forward illegal recruiting for reserves for the armed forces. A complete training centre existed for these illegal



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formations at Neuhammer. These officers had come straight from the nationalist organisation, the *Stahlhelm*, but had resigned their membership as soon as they took up their duties in the Reichswehr. In the town of Brieg, for example, an officer had resigned from the *Stahlhelm* twenty-four hours after his appointment; in Wohlau a captain, though he officially retained no connection with the *Stahlhelm*, attended the evening rallies of the local groups and asked for recruits; and in Liegnitz an officer had told the recruits that every Silesian German had to be prepared for Polish aggression.

Stücklen further stated in his confidential memorandum that although the employers' association of Silesia had given large funds to these officers, money had been transferred from the Reichswehr to the Lower Silesian district for the same purpose.

At the same time the Democratic deputy Baron Hartmann von Richthofen had put equally disturbing questions before the Reichswehr Minister about the composition of the Officers Corps of the Reichswehr, querying the stability of the corps and its attitude towards the Republican constitution. Baron von Richthofen knew the attitude of the Prussian nobleman well, for he had moved in that circle before he became a Democratic deputy. The figures which he put forward were eloquent :

of 595 cavalry officers	265	were nobles
of 724 Reichswehr Ministry officers	162	„ „
of 1,512 infantry officers	265	„ „
of 589 artillery officers	61	„ „

The total proportion of nobles among the officers of the entire Reichswehr was 20 per cent. In the higher ranks the proportion was even greater :

of 42 generals	25	were nobles
of 105 colonels	45	„ „

Baron von Richthofen added that for nearly ten thousand members of the Reichswehr there were nearly a thousand officers, nearly three hundred warrant officers and three to four thousand petty officers, and the obvious discrepancy between the number of officers and N.C.O.'s needed for ten thousand men, and the actual figures, were also violently criticised by him.

Creuzburg, another deputy, completed the indictment by comparing the monies spent on the upkeep of the old Imperial General

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Staff of 1913 and on the 1927 Army Command of the Reichswehr. The old Imperial General Staff was able to administer and direct the vast organisation of the active peace-time army and its reserve formations with a staff of 619 officers at a cost of the equivalent of £240,000. For an army for which it claimed to have no reserves and only a peace-time strength of 100,000 the Reichswehr Ministry and the office of the C.-in-C. needed 922 staff officers and spent nearly half a million pounds!

The entire Reichswehr Ministry was left gasping. The former Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Hans von Seeckt, who had been dismissed because he had permitted members of the House of Hohenzollern to attend two manoeuvres of the Reichswehr, had dreaded the exposure which he long felt hanging over him. The new Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Wilhelm Heye, was completely at a loss. He could neither answer the charges nor defend himself and his officers, nor was he subsequently able to supply the responsible minister with material upon which a defence could be based.

Here von Fritsch showed what a soldier-politician he had become. He did not shrink from personally canvassing his critics, treating them to a familiar mixture of cajolery and admonition, reminding them of their eternal and unceasing duty towards the Fatherland. He neglected no means that might justify his militarist purpose. Strings were pulled right and left. Social pressure, warnings against too outspoken criticism of the army, the patriotic appeal that so confuses the German democrat, all were brought to bear, with the final result that the Army and Navy budget was passed. The reductions forced upon the Reichswehr administration were farcical: £225,000 for the Army and £112,000 for the Navy.

Now Colonel von Fritsch was able to continue the task which he himself described as the 'heritage of von Seeckt'. This heritage consisted of plans based on the most efficient use of the reduced armed forces of the German Reich in the event of war. He worked on plans that provided for an offensive in the east and a temporary defensive in the west. The plan for Poland, which originated almost entirely with him, was ready by 1928.

Under this scheme heavy attacks on the Polish army were to cause the collapse of the country. The first blow was to be concen-

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trated in the area of Deutsch-Krone-Schneidemühl-Frankfurt-ander-Oder. The immediate aim was to cut the vital railway Gdynia-Kattowitz and so paralyse the great chain of communications upon which the Polish army would depend in its advance. German concentrations were to be protected in the north by weak cavalry, and in the immediate south by weak motorised formations. A second blow was to be delivered simultaneously from the East Prussian sectors of Deutsch-Eylau-Marienwerder-Rosenberg, reaching deep into Poland and joining the first assault group in the area of Graudenz-Thorn. Speed was essential for the movement of both groups, and von Fritsch hoped that the strong Polish Pomerelle army would be cut off and exposed to annihilation. If sufficient forces were still available a third, though weaker, assault group could deploy from Silesia in the sector of Kreuzburg, and strike through Petrikau against Lodz. The detailed timing given to the divisions employed showed that von Fritsch demanded a maximum of speed in order to strike before the full power of the Polish regular and reserve armies could be brought to bear in defence. With little essential change this was the plan executed in 1939.

Von Fritsch meant to fight defensively in the west and to leave western Germany without any cover except for weak forces stationed along the lower Weser and in southern Saxony. After the conclusion of his Polish campaign he intended to force the Reich Government to offer peace terms to France, promising the reinstatement of the Polish State, the evacuation of Poland by the German army, and permission for the re-establishment of a limited Polish army. The peace would also provide for a withdrawal of French troops, and in return Germany was to be allowed a peace-time armed strength of its own choice.

In his plan von Fritsch used material provided by General Wetzell, who in the First World War had been Chief of Operations under Ludendorff and had held a similar position in the Reichswehr. Wetzell had some original ideas of his own, but these were discarded by von Fritsch who had no difficulty with Wetzell's successor in the Reichswehr, Werner von Blomberg.

There was criticism of the plan by General Staff officers inside the Reichswehr, who pointed out that the author had only a limited field experience and knew little about the handling of

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smaller formations. In their view he was too optimistic. But in discussions with his superiors von Fritsch was able to sweep away these objections with arguments that were contained in the details of the plan and which stressed the necessity for utmost speed, for which the highly trained Reichswehr of that time was well adapted.

Having completed his work in the camouflaged General Staff, von Fritsch studied the conditions of the proposed campaign on the spot. He became chief of the Artillery Regiment No. 2, and in quick succession Artillery Leader II at the 2nd Army District in Stettin, a district immediately involved in his scheme. On 1st November 1930 he asked for transfer to the 1st Cavalry Division in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, where, as divisional commander, he held the key position, and by that time his ideas dominated the mind of almost every officer inside the General Staff.

His work was acknowledged in June 1932 by promotion to the rank of lieutenant-general, and with the arrest in the same year of the Prussian Government in Berlin, and the assumption of the chancellorship by Franz von Papen, the way was opened to von Fritsch and his friends to achieve the re-armament and expansion of the German armed forces without a campaign against Poland. For the closer execution of this first aim he was made commander in the 3rd Army District with headquarters in Berlin.

He had been prepared to be ruthless if that were necessary for his purpose, but he now abandoned the idea of a surprise attack on Poland, and turned to political means that promised the same success at less cost. The man at first chosen to carry through the expansion of the army by the new method was General von Hammerstein-Equort, Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr under the War Minister Colonel General Werner von Blomberg, von Fritsch's former chief in the camouflaged General Staff department of 1927. But in von Hammerstein-Equort, the arch-junker, there was nothing of the politician. Never tired of criticising the first Hitler Cabinet, he accused Hitler of driving towards a premature war whilst army expansion was still under way, and his strictures on the arming of the storm trooper divisions were so blunt and severe as to defeat their purpose. He antagonised Hitler at a time when the future dictator was still willing temporarily to compromise with the officer class, and his career was brief. Then, with the appointment of von Fritsch as Commander-

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in-Chief of the Reichswehr on 1st February 1934, Hitler thought he had found the man to whom concessions could be made.

Von Fritsch, holding the same theories as von Hammerstein-Equort, but with a larger view, was fully aware of the causes of von Hammerstein-Equort's failure. He knew how to wait for his opening, and in the first few weeks he avoided the issue. Then towards April of the same year he was able to force Hitler's hand. In dealing with the crisis over the storm troopers he used an appeal that with Hitler has never failed—the security of the Führer's life. Up to that time it had been quite obvious to Hitler, Göring, Hess and several other leading personalities inside the Nazi Party that Roehm, the Chief-of-Staff of the storm troopers and the security echelon (S.A. and S.S.), was preparing to arm the men of his organisation. They were satisfied that this armament was intended for the benefit of the country, and that Roehm genuinely believed that his storm troopers could be used as a militia in the expansion of the armed forces of the future Greater German Reich. But von Fritsch, on material supplied by the intelligence service of the Reichswehr, was able to show that Roehm was preparing to use his armed storm troopers against the existing government and that he had a plan for rebellion during which 'the Führer would be shot by accident'. This sensational exposure of the storm troopers' organisation produced the results that von Hammerstein's more honest, but cruder methods had failed to accomplish.

It has never been established whether these documents produced by von Fritsch were genuine or not, but they were the death of Roehm and his friends. While the executions—or murders, for there was no pretence of legalised form—were going on, officers of von Fritsch's intimate circle played with the idea of a *coup d'état* of their own. Von Fritsch himself dismissed the scheme, but saw that it came to the knowledge of Hitler via Göring, who was careful at that moment to assume a more 'neutral' role. It provided for a Cabinet to be headed by either von Fritsch or von Blomberg (as a puppet); the Foreign Minister was to be Herr von Nadolny, a diplomat who had been an active peace-time officer in the German Army, and General von Hammerstein was to be Minister of War. The immediate arrest of Himmler, Heydrich, Goebbels and Darré was intended. Darré, the Minister of Agriculture, was regarded with displeasure by the Junker class because

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of his hereditary estate laws which brought the landowning class under the strict supervision of the State. One of these laws provided that if a person was 'unfit to till soil' the State could appoint another man, not as administrator but as owner, whilst the former owner stood a good chance of ending up in a lunatic asylum. Darré was fully aware of the animosity he had aroused amongst von Fritsch's friends, which explains why he took every opportunity to discredit the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The civil administration was to be handed over to the industrial leaders of the Rhenanian and Ruhr districts. The slogan to be addressed to Hindenburg was 'Save Germany for the Fourth Time', and an excellent motive for the execution of the plan was to be found in the assassination of General von Schleicher and his wife.

Having put an end to this half-hearted plot by revealing it, and so to all appearances saving Hitler at the most dangerous crisis of his political life, von Fritsch exacted his price. He secured a definite assurance that a repetition of the 'playing soldier' policy of the late Captain Roehm would not be permitted. Hitler wrote a letter to the Minister of War, Colonel General von Blomberg, shortly after the election of August 1934, in which he said: 'I will always consider it my duty to stand for the existence and inviolability of the armed forces and to make the army the only bearer of weapons in the nation'. This was accepted by von Fritsch as the final check upon any Nazi leaders who might look at the Reichswehr generals with jealous eyes.

This apparently decisive internal political success encouraged him to exploit further his already strong position in the Government. In November 1934 he impugned the good intentions of Hitler and his closer Nazi friends in a political question that was quite outside the province of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. It had come to the knowledge of higher Reichswehr officers that the Nazi Party was about to force the hand of Hitler in his dealings with heavy industry and the big banks. Party economists thought that the time had come when private enterprise should be controlled by the Reich, and that foreign assets, shares and banking accounts in the hands of German individuals should be handed over to the Government. Leaders in finance and industry, alarmed for their private interests, turned to von Fritsch for help, whose strong position after the Roehm

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breach they recognised. He took up their cause, made strong representations to Hitler and appeared to prevail, for Hitler instructed the Government officials concerned to deny that these proposals formed any part of the Nazi programme.

An argument put forward by the Nazi Party chiefs in favour of this new measure of control was that, with freedom to administer private finance, the Reichswehr would have the benefit of larger funds for foreign intelligence purposes, while von Fritsch for his part recognised that this intelligence work would be largely handled by the foreign department of the Party itself, and various other 'camouflaged' organisations all over the world that were directly or indirectly under the Party's control. As more recent history shows, von Fritsch's success was temporary, and the grip which the Party octopus sought to gain over the whole Reich and its affairs abroad was only delayed.

For a time, however, he seemed to represent the country's only bulwark against the Nazi Party inside Germany. The illegal 'German Freedom Party' saw in him a friend of their cause, and quoted him in their secret pamphlets, circulated in Berlin and other larger cities of the Reich. For the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr such friends were extremely embarrassing, and on many occasions he rebuffed them with flat denials. But the small illegal anti-Nazi movements inside Germany were at that time not easily discouraged, and when it became known that von Fritsch had had a hand in stopping the Party from acquiring control over German foreign assets, they carried their support so far that in Berlin it amounted to an open demonstration, though on a small scale. During a wrestling match in the famous Circus Busch in Berlin a group of three hundred men suddenly stood up and shouted 'Down with the hunger government—down with the system'. Special police cordons were rushed to the place, all the demonstrators were arrested, and were subsequently subjected to the worst form of inquisition by the Gestapo.

The chief of the Gestapo, Heinrich Himmler, thought he had evidence that the demonstration had been encouraged by the attitude of the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, and without informing Hitler, he ordered his second-in-command, Reinhard Heydrich, to collect further evidence of the disloyalty

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of von Fritsch. A few months later he approached Hitler with a bundle of documents and a number of witnesses who were willing to swear that von Fritsch had committed immoral acts. But Himmler had miscalculated, for Hitler generally knew the men who could serve him best at a given moment. He rebuked Himmler and dismissed the accusations with the laconic answer: 'I need von Fritsch's cool nerves for the declaration of the independence of German rearmament and the reoccupation of the Rhineland. Burn the documents and shoot the witnesses'.

Himmler, however, did nothing of the kind. He kept his documents, and instead of shooting the witnesses put them into a concentration camp for safe keeping, giving Heydrich further secret instructions to watch the movements and contacts of the Commander-in-Chief as closely as possible.

From the beginning of 1935 von Fritsch concentrated even more than usual on purely military problems. He was called upon to decide between higher German military leaders who could not come to an agreement among themselves about the final composition of the expanded German army.

On the one hand, von Fritsch insisted on that essential of all modern strategy, speed. There were a number of officers—known inside the Reichswehr organisation as 'the technical men'—who were willing to satisfy this demand for an army composed almost exclusively of tanks, mechanised and motorised formations. Their outspoken advocates were Generals Lutz, commander-in-chief of the Panzer forces, Guderian, Panzer specialist, and other higher officers, amongst them Nehring and many General Staff officers. Even such generals as von Reichenau and von Bock, whose names were associated with theories in which tank formations were considered as only part of a modern army, now favoured the technical advocates.

On the other hand, a strong faction of highly experienced generals opposed such drastic changes in the course of rearmament. Chief of these were the senior general of the Reichswehr, Gerd von Rundstedt, the defence expert Ritter von Leeb, the future Chief of the General Staff, General Beck, the commanding general of the 2nd District, General Blaskowitz, and many others.

It was left to von Fritsch to decide. He found a compromise that hurt nobody and more or less satisfied every general's de-



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mands. But broadly he held to the view that the efficiency of the comparatively small army which he commanded at that time would suffer by the too rapid expansion which Hitler's future plans categorically demanded.

Hitler's first aim was to test the will of the democracies to put a halt to this expansion inside and outside Germany. He proposed to reoccupy the Rhineland and to make a complete and open repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles by declaring the *Wehrfreiheit* (sovereignty over the expansion of armaments inside Germany). Von Fritsch made it quite clear that he would not risk the progress of the development of the armed forces by any such ambitious undertakings until he was sure there would be no fighting. He agreed to back Hitler to the utmost in a policy of bluff, but thought it impossible to challenge the combined French and British forces in 1935. This pact between Hitler and von Fritsch held good, and von Fritsch set to work. Whilst Hitler continued in his speeches to make threatening appeals to foreign powers, half asking them for favours, half menacing them with war, von Fritsch devised his own methods for probing the spirit of resistance of the west.

The first opportunity was given to him in January 1935, during the plebiscite in the Saar when the French Government had sent seventy-five French Foreign Legionaries there to record their votes in favour of France. The Commander-in-Chief sent an agent into the Saar to deal with these men. They were promised £400 each and quick promotion inside the Reichswehr if they would vote for Germany, and then ostentatiously desert the French army to join Hitler's. Sixty-seven accepted these offers, only eight refused. The French authorities did nothing.

The next step was to send serving officers and men of the German Army to the Bavarian Palatinate as 'visitors'. These visits were most artfully camouflaged, and the following is a typical example of what happened shortly before the formal reoccupation of the Rhineland by the German Army. One Sunday morning in 1935 twenty-two men of the 2nd Company of the 21st Infantry Regiment, in full uniform, paid a visit to the small city of Landau, in the Palatinate, and were received by the local mayor and a deputation of the population under the very noses of the French border officials. They stayed in the town against all the rules and

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regulations of the Treaty of Versailles and, contrary to the most solemn assurances given to France, visited the barracks of the old 18th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, which had been garrisoned there before the war of 1914-18.

Paris maintained complete silence about the incident. Timid protests raised by newspapers and deputies of such French frontier cities as Strasbourg and Mulhouse were immediately answered by the Reichswehr in a fashion that showed the tortuous and ruthless mind that inspired such schemes. It was represented to the French people that the 2nd Company of the 21st Infantry Regiment was simply carrying on the tradition of the former 18th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, and that it was perfectly in order for these men to visit the former barracks of their predecessors in the old Imperial Army. Their intention, Berlin explained, was merely to keep up the spirit of tradition inside the army of the Third Reich.

These and other carefully arranged incidents, which were referred to by von Fritsch as 'reconnaissance in the field of foreign policy', convinced him that the great throw could be risked; and the Rhineland was duly reoccupied.

So far he had advanced almost in step with Hitler. The differences in their methods were more those of form than purpose. On the one hand was the head of an army, jealous of its pre-eminence in the state, and very consciously exercising his authority, and on the other was the man without tradition, using a technique which was calculated at every turn to emphasise his own personal predominance. Von Fritsch naturally thought first of the army, Hitler of the Party upon which he depended. In their internal and international conduct they were alike without scruple, for neither with the Commander-in-Chief nor with the Führer did any sense of honour prevent a systematic policy of deception towards the Allies, any amount of trickery towards the German Government itself, or the eventual assault on Poland in 1939.

Von Fritsch's arrogance and self-confidence, as we have seen, were noticed by General Niessel. He was now very conscious of his powers, and set a limit to Hitler's. He gave special orders for the conduct of officers and men in the Führer's presence: instead of their addressing the Supreme War Lord with the Party form 'Heil Hitler' he directed that 'Heil mein Führer!' was enough, and

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more in keeping with their own dignity. The sting of this insistence on the army's distinctive place in the state was not lost, we may be sure, upon Himmler and his friends, who had not forgotten the end of their first round with the Commander-in-Chief.

The successful occupation of the Rhineland exalted Hitler as much in the eyes of the Party as in his own, and von Fritsch's bearing stiffened accordingly. Hitler's strategy had been proved right. The democracies, so recently the conquerors, were no longer able to hold their own; their guns, as was said later of the League of Nations, 'would not go off'. When Saarbrücken was occupied Hitler appeared in splendour and received the personal homage of his chief leaders, Himmler, Hess, Ley and others. All this exhilarated Hitler until the atmosphere of worship was broken by the sudden arrival in the market square of a field-grey Mercedes car with von Fritsch and one or two staff officers. Von Fritsch jumped out, advanced with cold face and erect figure towards the Führer, gave a short military salute, ignored the outstretched hand with which he was greeted, made a quick and brief report stating that everything was quiet on the frontier, sharply saluted again, turned on his heels, walked to the car and drove off. It was a chilling interlude the effect of which remained to cramp relations between the two men.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 von Fritsch saw an admirable opportunity of testing the efficiency of the new German army, its technical inventions and modern strategic conceptions—but no more. The first reinforcements that reached Franco from Germany were despatched with this idea, but as it happened the advance guards of the Condor Legion proved none too successful against an opponent who did not command even a fraction of the modern equipment Berlin had sent. When von Fritsch was pressed for reinforcements for Spain he revealed what his enemies called a 'decidedly non-interventionist complex', and in the salons of Dr. Goebbels and Field Marshal Göring stories were told about the western democracies' best non-interventionist supporter, von Fritsch.

Though this tension within the highest political and military circles of the Reich was carefully concealed, the French newspaper *L'Oeuvre* was able to publish, in November 1936, an article which, very much to the surprise of the people concerned in Germany,

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described the civilian side of the Nazi Government (together with the two generals, von Blomberg and von Reichenau, and, of course, the younger army officers), as a hundred per cent for intervention. Decidedly against this 'adventure', as they called it, were von Fritsch, von Rundstedt, and the Chief of the German Navy, Admiral Erich Raeder. It was further stated by *L'Oeuvre* that von Fritsch had tendered his resignation.

This exposure acted in Berlin like a bombshell. Hitler was furious. Something had happened which he termed 'an indiscretion bordering on high treason'. Knowing the mood of his supreme war lord, Himmler thought the time had come to present further charges. These reports had been accumulated by Heydrich, who had been busy on his original commission to spy on the Commander-in-Chief, and this time Himmler reported that after the Nuremberg Party rally von Fritsch attended a banquet given to all foreign military attachés present, and that during the speeches he had raised his glass towards the Soviet Russian military attaché and proposed a toast to the Red Army. Himmler further procured material for an allegation that the Commander-in-Chief was secretly involved in political matters that were beyond his province, and that he aimed at keeping contact with certain anti-Nazi elements whose activities were fostered abroad by German political refugees.

Hitler did not this time give the orders to Himmler he had given before. He advised his Gestapo chief to lie low, but in his Reichstag speech in January 1937 he made a pointed reference to the material that had been put before him. He would never, he said, be found 'dining and wining' with Bolsheviks. And there was a postscript to this second attempt of Himmler's to overthrow the Commander-in-Chief: the allegation that Himmler managed to smuggle into the hands of the Soviet Russian ambassador in Berlin a report to the effect that the Soviet Marshal Tuchatchevsky had had direct contact with von Fritsch. Heydrich later claimed that Tuchatchevsky was executed on the strength of the material in this report, but this remained unconfirmed.

The expansion of the German armed forces and their reserves had now rapidly increased, and provision was made that in case of war the existing companies would be the cadres of future battalions, while regiments would be developed into divisions and

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divisions into corps. Von Fritsch could well be content with the progress he had made, and obviously it was these achievements in the military sphere that led Hitler, as supreme commander, to refrain from the action against him that was demanded by the extremists inside the Nazi Party.

Always sensitive to anything that stung his vanity, Hitler was present on an occasion when von Fritsch let fall one of his satirical remarks. It was in 1937, when the golden emblem of the Nazi Party, the emblem issued to the first hundred thousand members of the Party, was bestowed on Admiral Raeder, the Secretary of State Dr. Meissner, the Prussian Finance Minister Dr. Popitz, Herr Funk, then still in the Propaganda Ministry, General Erhard Milch, State Secretary for Air, and von Fritsch himself. Not all these had had the luck to join the Party in its early stages, and on Milch's golden emblem von Fritsch acidly commented: 'Old grand-daddy Milch would turn in his grave in the Jewish cemetery of Breslau if he could see Aryanised Erhard with this honour on his chest'. The assembly froze into silence, and the only thing that could be heard was von Fritsch's chuckle at his own gibe. Hitler, it is reported, seemed to be on the verge of one of his hysterical outbursts, but the tension relaxed in face of von Fritsch's bluff unconsciousness of the enormity he had committed.

In October 1937 he went to Egypt on holiday. On his return towards the end of December of the same year he was given to understand that Dr. Goebbels was about to follow his example. Von Fritsch wrote him a letter in which he advised him not to overcrowd Egypt with 'convalescents', and that as the army always had priority in everything, even holidays, the Doctor had better stay at home.

This was one of the last political 'jokes' that were permitted to von Fritsch. Whilst he was relaxing on the banks of the Nile a trap had been set for him. It was the work of Himmler and Heydrich, who had the assistance of Franz von Papen, a former bosom friend of von Fritsch, and General Wilhelm Keitel, an obscure general officer under von Fritsch's command inside the Reichswehr Ministry. Keitel was known as the arch-plotter in the Reichswehr, who had earned among other nicknames that of 'chamber-maid of the Reich Chancellery' because of his frequent, almost daily, visits to Hitler.

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It started with von Blomberg's proposed marriage, of which no clear account went out of Germany at the time. Perhaps we may digress for a moment. In a healthy society it would have remained what it was, a small personal affair, affecting nobody but those involved and their families. But in the Third Reich it revealed the deep division which existed between the old order and the new, and the fanatical devotion of both to codes that were held to embody their aims. Hitler, whilst complaining bitterly to the world in general, described Germany as an oppressed nation. When he said this to the democracies he did not mean to imply (though he may have been conscious of it) that there existed an oppressed mass of the people who out of fear had long submitted to a *Herrenvolk* of their own blood, that is, the army caste with its privileges and priorities. Perhaps the Nazis felt that at last they were being led not only against enemies outside the Reich but against their own overlords within. The masters of the old order may, of course, have been less crude in their methods than are those of the new, for the older Germany had a system of law the administration of which was not at the mercy of a dictating government, and German intellect and industry, unhampered by political restriction, commanded world-wide respect, and the Civil Service, free from corruption, ranked high abroad.

No sign of this inarticulate revolt now came to the surface, though it was implicit in the army's assertion of the exclusiveness of its own caste. But it explains why the military leaders of the nation, with their very real if limited cultural background, mixed up trivial and tragic issues in the von Blomberg affair.

Now for the facts. Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg intended marrying a lady of no family who had hitherto been employed in the egg distribution department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Hitler and Göring congratulated the Field Marshal on his decision. They told him that the proposed union would give substantial proof that the Minister of War of the Third Reich had completely grasped the true meaning of the 'socialism' that was inherent in the Nazi community. With this blessing von Blomberg, bemused as only a man in love can be, for he was of the army caste, and knew its traditions, married Fräulein Erika Gruhn. His Commander-in-Chief and other generals of the army were profoundly shocked, as von Blomberg should have expected

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them to be. Their world was rocking, and something had to be done.

Von Fritsch at once called a conference of the leading army officers. This took place on 28th January 1938, seventeen generals being present, and was nothing less than a 'palace rebellion' against von Blomberg in the first place, and secondly against Hitler. Though the conference started with the question of what was to be done about the War Minister's proposed marriage, von Fritsch soon widened the issue. He explained to the seventeen that, as they knew, he had received complaints from the army chaplains that freedom of religious worship was severely curtailed by the indirect influence of the Gestapo upon the soldiers. In fact, some of the men had taken shorthand notes of sermons given by some of the divisional pastors, and the chaplains were uneasy about the consequences. Then, leaving the spiritual issues, which were of some concern to von Fritsch, he declared that Hitler had the intention of taking both Austria and Czecho-Slovakia during that year, if necessary by force. As Commander-in-Chief he deemed it premature to start a major conflict in Europe at that time, especially as two branches of the German armed forces were behind their schedule, namely the heavy artillery and the field fortifications in the east and the west. Another point was that the Luftwaffe was making further demands for closer participation in the larger strategical plans that were properly under the control of the General Staff of the army and the Commander-in-Chief. Erhard Milch, Secretary of State for Air, backed by Göring, was bent on building up an overwhelming air force in a minimum of time, and on that ground demanded that he ought to be consulted to a greater extent when, for example, plans were discussed for the probable invasion of countries that were not in immediate contact with the frontiers of the Reich, such as Norway.

Von Fritsch reminded his audience that plans for the invasion of Norway had been carefully considered as far back as 1925 by the able General von Seeckt and the then Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Navy, Admiral Zenker; and said that though a large part of future operations in that direction would fall upon the Luftwaffe, he saw no reason to give further encouragement to this 'air force upstart'. He pointed to the danger of creating an embarrassing precedent if the generals once made such concessions.

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A further point raised was the demand that the 'Franco gamble' be brought to an end. To continue the entanglement in Spain, it was argued, would give the upper hand to such people as the retired General Ritter von Epp, Reich Commissar in Bavaria, and various other, more civilian, 'strategists' who were already dreaming of the reconquest of colonies and other such nonsense. Von Fritsch said that as early as 1932 Hitler had forwarded to President Hindenburg plans evolved by von Epp that were to replace the circumspect and carefully devised ones of the Reichswehr Ministry. This clique, von Fritsch disclosed, was now using the Spanish affair as a lever for further schemes, and another retired General, Faupel, was their tool for stirring up trouble in this direction.

To show that he meant business von Fritsch had the day before taken the liberty of sending a telegram of congratulation to the ex-Kaiser at Doorn on the occasion of his birthday. He now revealed that this telegram had made Hitler furious, and with similar hints he led the assembly to understand that they had not been rallied merely to hold counsel over the issue of the War Minister's wedding, but on the general line of policy for the future. He demanded a vote of confidence from them, assuring them that all they had to do was to stand by him for the next few days while he, as he expressed it in typical Prussian military jargon, would in the meantime 'manage the shop'. (*Ich werde schon den Laden schmeissen.*)

The next morning a company of the crack garrison regiment of Berlin (the Wachregiment) marched as usual from their barracks in the Rathenauer Strasse in the north of Berlin to the centre of the city, crossing the Tiergarten, Berlin's Hyde Park, and entering through the Brandenburg Gate. This company, complete with brass band and mounted officer, were accustomed to relieve the Guard of Honour in front of the monument for the fallen soldiers of the last war. They usually marched down Unter den Linden and changed the guard opposite the Prussian State Opera building. Then after goose-stepping for a short time in front of the monument, they recrossed the Brandenburg Gate to reinforce the Guards of the War Ministry in the Bendlerstrasse. Usually only the first squad, which actually relieved the Guard of Honour in front of the monument, carried live ammunition. On this



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occasion the company, after passing the Brandenburg Gate, did not march straight down to the monument but left the broad avenue of the Unter den Linden and turned to the right into the Wilhelmstrasse, passing the British Embassy.

On the corner of the Propaganda Ministry, facing the Wilhelmplatz and the Reich Chancellery they came to a halt. Bayonets were fixed, and then one of those incidents occurred which in themselves are small but in their significance mark the course of history. Whilst fixing his bayonet a private who did not belong to the squad that was required to relieve the Guards near the monument, ripped open the cover of the leather pouches on his belt. Several clips of live ammunition fell out. The lieutenant commanding the platoon immediately picked them up, but they had not escaped the attention of several plain clothes Gestapo men, who had already been alarmed by the unusual direction which the company had taken that morning.

Just about then Hitler was expected to arrive by car from the Tempelhof aerodrome, and would have to pass the company to enter the Reich Chancellery. The plain clothes Gestapo men took a taxi, raced down the Wilhelmstrasse, and near the Hallesches Tor caught the large open Mercedes with Hitler inside it. They reported what they had seen, and Hitler instantly gave orders to return to the Tempelhof aerodrome. There a few minutes later a battalion of Göring's own Luftwaffe bodyguard occupied the restaurant building, thus safeguarding Hitler himself from any possible surprises, and meanwhile a General Staff officer had arrived in the Wilhelmstrasse by sidecar and ordered the company to take up their usual duties in front of the monument and then to return to the War Ministry.

It has never been disclosed whether von Fritsch ordered these strange movements of that company, nor whether an attempt on Hitler's life was planned, but it is certain that Hitler himself was convinced that the Commander-in-Chief was about to assassinate him. However, when he sent for von Fritsch in the afternoon he gave him no indication of his real feelings. He discussed the von Blomberg marriage; von Fritsch on his side pressed for a further reply to questions arising from the larger issues which he had discussed the day before with his friends. Hitler agreed to ask von Blomberg to retire, but he refused to agree to any of the more im-

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portant suggestions. Von Fritsch took the first concession about von Blomberg's marriage as a sign of weakness on Hitler's part, and subsequently treated him in the most off-hand manner of which a Prussian officer is capable. This conversation was witnessed by Colonel Warlimont, who had ideas of his own, and subsequently became one of Hitler's military advisers. By this time the Führer had made up his mind to abolish the office of Minister of War and to appoint a Commander-in-Chief who would be directly responsible to himself. Knowing the ability of von Fritsch, he had thought of putting him in the office, but it was now clear that if he accepted he would demand too much. Von Fritsch left him in the best of spirits and reported to his friends that as Hitler had given in regarding von Blomberg's wedding he would soon make concessions on more substantial matters.

But there was a man in von Fritsch's own office who had waited for this opportunity; General Wilhelm Keitel. This arch-plotter and intriguer had been kept fully informed—not officially by Hitler but unofficially and more efficiently by many of his friends, among them the personal A.D.C. to Hitler, S.A. Group Leader Brückner. Von Fritsch did not trust Keitel, but completely underestimated his diplomatic abilities. As far as military matters went he used to refer to him constantly as 'that jackass', a remark that had even impressed Hitler, who was not at all convinced of the strategical genius which Keitel claimed to possess.

On the other hand, Hitler was convinced that preparations for the rearmament and expansion of the German Army and its training had gone so far ahead that he could now dispense with the services of von Fritsch if he could find someone better than Keitel as a substitute. That was not an easy task. He had been kept fully informed about the generals' conference, and the seemingly uniform mind that governed them, and so he enlisted the services of the then German ambassador in Vienna, Franz von Papen, to probe the solidity of their front. Von Papen, without inquiring directly, had sufficient scouts in the camp of the higher clique to discover that a breach could be made in it, and when von Fritsch returned to his friends and reported to them on his conversation with Hitler he found to his great surprise that some of his colleagues seemed to have changed their minds over night, above all, General von Reichenau, General von Kleist, General

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List and General von Bock. Generals von Rundstedt, von Leeb, and Kress von Kressenstein, however, stayed on his side, and were willing to remain there whatever happened. The position of General von Brauchitsch, General Officer commanding the East Prussian district, was undefined.

The Intelligence Service of the Reichswehr reported that Himmler had ordered Heydrich to be ready to act at any moment. Von Fritsch was disturbed, for he did not underestimate the powers of the Gestapo. Seeking to create a comparatively safe atmosphere around himself, he invited foreign diplomats accredited to the Berlin Government to dinner for the evening of the 1st February. When these gentlemen arrived at his flat they were told that the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr regretted very much that because of ill-health he was unable to attend the dinner party. This was diplomatic. As a matter of fact, during the afternoon of that day a small squad of hand-picked Gestapo men under the personal leadership of Reinhard Heydrich had arrested the Commander-in-Chief and taken him to a small villa outside Berlin, on the road to Potsdam. This villa had been secretly hired by Heydrich some time before for the purpose of 'questioning the Commander-in-Chief', and everything had been set for the great day. Here Himmler awaited Heydrich and his quarry; Hitler had been informed, and was also expected at the villa.

However, von Fritsch had not been Commander-in-Chief under the Hitler regime for four years without understanding Nazi methods: he had seen too many political personalities disappear and had watched the Gestapo octopus spread its tentacles throughout the whole life of the nation. Knowing that he was no safer than anyone else who had caused the Führer uneasiness, he had long before arranged with von Rundstedt that if he should disappear without known reason, von Rundstedt would at once inform the Intelligence Department of the Reichswehr, which in such an event had a standing order to despatch two plain clothes officers in search of him. Accordingly two such officers reported that afternoon that the Commander-in-Chief had left his flat in company with Gestapo officers, and had been accompanied by them to a villa near Potsdam. Thus it was that only an hour after von Fritsch's arrival and while Himmler was still waiting for Hitler, officers of the Potsdam garrison surrounded the building,

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forced their way in at the point of their pistols, arrested the Gestapo guards and put Himmler and Heydrich against the wall with their arms behind their heads—treatment these two men had often imposed on others but had probably never before received themselves. Von Rundstedt reported to von Fritsch, and whilst they were discussing the best way of disposing of their two main prisoners, Hitler arrived, followed by Göring. Then there was a scene of double-crossing and bargaining and trading of lives and positions that would have thrilled the most hardened gangster. Finally von Rundstedt went home, Himmler and Heydrich were allowed to drop their arms, the S.S. guards were released, and the officers of the Potsdam garrison returned to barracks. And for all the outside world knew, nothing had happened.

On returning to Berlin Fritsch conferred with von Rundstedt and von Leeb, and the three were forced to the conclusion that, as a number of the generals who had attended the conferences of the past few days had evidently betrayed them, there was no sense in their remaining as serving officers in the German Army. In due course ten other generals were consulted, and all, including Kress von Kressenstein, agreed to ask to be relieved of their duties immediately. Von Kressenstein said later of his letter of resignation: 'I am glad to say that this piece of correspondence of mine to our Supreme Commander, Adolf Hitler, even lacked the customary politeness and showed this out-of-date lance corporal just where he gets off.'

The readiness with which Hitler had come to an agreement with von Fritsch and von Rundstedt at the villa was largely dictated by the attitude of the Commander-in-Chief-designate, General Walther von Brauchitsch, for the same morning von Brauchitsch had had a private conference with Hitler in which he accepted the position of Commander-in-Chief on condition that the position of Minister of War should be abolished and that Keitel should receive an appointment making him at once a sort of permanent under-secretary-of-state-for-war and chief personal military adviser to Hitler. A just estimate of the military qualifications of Keitel left von Brauchitsch little concerned about the personal advice the Supreme Commander would get.

The acceptance by von Brauchitsch of the highest position in the army without previously informing the man who at the time

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held that position, and after he had himself joined in the conference of generals called by von Fritsch, shows us better how to appraise the Prussian military conception of honour—'stern, upright and honourable Prussian generals who know nothing but their duty', as Colonel General von Seeckt described them in his address to officers of the First Army District, Berlin, in 1924. Inside the German Army and throughout Germany it is an accepted maxim that officers of the armed forces claim precedence in everything on the ground that they are the leaders of the instrument that makes it possible for the community of the German Reich to live at all. To foreign countries, every German is ready to excuse any action that any of his officers may see fit to take. The dogma of 'reason of State', perhaps never distinguishable from the passion for personal domination, has been woven into the mind of every German leader of every political denomination: even to the general public it was sacrilege up to 1933 to believe that this ideal was used by the leaders of the armed forces to achieve their personal ambitions. Yet among these leaders it would be difficult to name one who could be shown to be inspired by anything above a narrow concept of personal domination.

To an outside world this 'palace rebellion' was hushed up by letters sent to von Blomberg and von Fritsch by Hitler, and as usual culminated in a supreme hypocritical effort. Hitler wrote to von Fritsch a few days later: 'You have often found yourself compelled because of your undermined health to ask me to release you from your office. As a sojourn in the south (he obviously refers to the Egyptian journey which von Fritsch had taken the previous year, and which had nothing to do with this crisis) which you made a short while ago has not had the desired effect, I have now decided to comply with your request. . . . With the restoration and strengthening of the German Army between March 1935 and February 1938 your name will be linked in history'.

That letter was written for the benefit of other countries, who had to be given the impression that the unity of the German command was unbroken. On the other hand both Goebbels and Himmler, allegedly acting under the immediate orders of Hitler, started whispering campaigns with the object of incriminating the dismissed Commander-in-Chief. Goebbels chose a line that was not without precedent. Hitler, explaining the shooting of

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his best friend Roehm in 1934, gave among other reasons the fact that Roehm had seen the French Ambassador, M. Francois-Poncet, and discussed foreign politics with him, a meeting that was regarded by Hitler, so he said, as high treason. Now Goebbels circulated the rumour that von Fritsch had had secret and treasonable relations with M. Daladier, the French War Minister. Himmler made a quite different accusation, but equally designed to mark von Fritsch as being opposed to Hitler's regime. He ordered his Gestapo men to whisper into the ears of the German people, among whom they found ready audience, that von Fritsch had attempted a monarchist plot in which the second son of the Crown Prince was named. After some time both Goebbels and Himmler issued a formal denial to such rumours, to which, of course, they thus gave fresh currency, as intended.

But the Nazis were not content at seeing von Fritsch out of office, and Heydrich, particularly, began producing new accusations. The chief security officer of the Gestapo had boasted of having in his hands evidence that would hang von Fritsch at any time. Knowing this, von Fritsch, while under detention in the villa near Potsdam, had demanded a fair trial of honour in which he could meet all accusations against him. He now repeated his demand, and for his immediate safety installed himself in an army camp near Hanover whilst the necessary court was being constituted. There he received a communication stating that the court would be held in the presence of Hitler, von Brauchitsch and several other generals, with Göring as president. Von Fritsch was to leave for Berlin by train.

One morning towards the end of March 1938 von Fritsch boarded a train at Hanover station. From inside his compartment he saw that the platform outside his carriage was surrounded by plain clothes Gestapo men. He at once left the compartment from the other side, passed through another train that had pulled up alongside, made his way to another platform, and took a car back to the army camp.

On arriving his batman handed him a telegram which had been sent to his quarters. It stated that von Fritsch had met with a fatal accident on his journey to Berlin, and that his body would be delivered to the army authorities in Berlin the next day. Three days later von Fritsch faced the court with this telegram in his

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pocket. The scene rivalled that in the villa, though no guns were drawn. Both Göring and Hitler kept quiet. Himmler and Heydrich, having had reports that their scheme to have the former Commander-in-Chief removed by a 'fatal accident' had failed, were not there.

Von Fritsch, in the account of the strange proceedings he gave to his former A.D.C., said that for two hours, 'I let them have broadside after broadside, and it needed a man like that thick-skinned Göring not to be blown to bits by it'. Then he returned to Hanover, where a small villa had been provided for him by a number of officer friends.

Months went by. The international situation came to boiling point again and again. Though Hitler was convinced that in von Brauchitsch he had a good substitute for von Fritsch, he was not at all convinced of the military qualifications of Keitel. He knew that in the dismissed Commander-in-Chief he had lost a source of military strength, especially as the charges trumped up by Himmler and Heydrich had been shown to be baseless.

He tried to approach von Fritsch again, and again the services of that agile busybody Franz von Papen were enlisted. The first opportunity came when von Fritsch 'in recognition of his services' (a compliment that raised much satirical comment in higher government and army circles in Berlin) was made Colonel-in-Chief of the Artillery Regiment No. 12 at the manoeuvre field of Gross-Born in Pomerania. In the presence of von Rundstedt, Blaskowitz, the local Commander-in-Chief, and other high officers, von Brauchitsch fêted von Fritsch. Nor did he end his compliments with the usual 'Heil Hitler!' but, as a special tribute to his former superior, called for a triple 'Hurrah' and ordered the band of the 12th Artillery to play the march past of the regiment—not, as was customary, two national anthems which would have inflicted on von Fritsch's ears the Horst Wessel song to whose author he had repeatedly referred as 'that libertine'. On this occasion it was left to von Fritsch to propose the *Sieg Heil* for the Fatherland, and, in a much lower voice, a *Heil* for the Führer. Hitler was not present, for the sufficient reason that all his attempts to conciliate von Fritsch had failed.

Von Fritsch insisted on three demands before he would enter into negotiations with Hitler again.

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(1) The instantaneous dismissal and the subsequent trial of Himmler.

(2) The immediate execution without trial of Heydrich.

(3) The dismissal without prosecution of Goebbels, and, to quote von Fritsch, 'that inflated elephant baby' Göring.

He had refused to be present at the ceremony at Gross-Born if Hitler were present, as he did not want to be taken by surprise by any announcements Hitler might make regarding his reinstatement. At the same time Hitler feared the worst as regards von Fritsch's visit to Pomerania, being certain that the displaced Commander-in-Chief would take the opportunity to talk things over with his former friends in that province, which is the playground of all arch-junkers.

Von Fritsch deliberately prolonged his stay, and it was only eight days later that Hitler, 'sacrificing his holidays', also went to Gross-Born, and to show how much superior he was in rank to the sacked von Fritsch he was not content with reviewing a single artillery regiment but ordered the presence of the entire Second Army Corps.

Up to the outbreak of the war in September 1939 he never lost hope of regaining the services of von Fritsch, and the untiring Franz von Papen besieged the latter with proposals. Hitler, who understood what he needed from professionals and experts, well knew that none of the active service generals was von Fritsch's equal. Fully aware as Supreme Commander of the origin and foundation of the plans of operation that were to be put into execution as soon as the first shot was fired, he had no intention of leaving it to men like Keitel, and he also doubted whether von Brauchitsch's great gifts were adequate. He was willing to accept von Fritsch even at the risk of having in high office the general who was least attached to himself and the Nazi Party.

But von Fritsch stubbornly maintained his demands, and he was never reinstated. It was reported that at times Hitler played with the idea of dismissing Himmler and Heydrich, but that he was given to understand by those two powerful men that any such order might leave him in danger. Thus it was that at the outbreak of this war von Fritsch, out of favour and no longer in the running for a leading position in the army, joined the regiment of which he had been made Colonel-in-Chief. On 22nd



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September an announcement by the High Command of the German armed forces stated that the former Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Baron Werner von Fritsch, had been killed in action. This report and a very brief obituary did not for long conceal the truth. Von Fritsch had been assassinated. It was reported that only the day before his alleged death in battle he had been seen at Grodzisk, a small town twenty-two miles from Warsaw. This report came from German prisoners who had been captured the next day by a squadron of Polish Lancers in front of Warsaw. It was therefore impossible for von Fritsch to have been leading an armed reconnaissance party of his artillery regiment, which would in any case have been an unlikely duty to be undertaken by so senior an officer.

With the end of the Polish campaign details about the assassination filtered through. On the morning of 22nd September von Fritsch was standing with the battery commander of No. 2 battery of his regiment in a comparatively quiet position, some miles to the west of Warsaw. He was looking through field glasses, and had asked his A.D.C. to get him a greatcoat. No. 2 battery commander had also left his post and joined the A.D.C. Von Fritsch was looking towards Warsaw. In his rear four S.S. men in the uniform of the German army were busying themselves. Suddenly one of them fired at von Fritsch's back, but at that moment the A.D.C. came out of a slit trench, received the bullet, and dropped dead. Von Fritsch turned on his heels and drew his pistol.

Two S.S. men were killed outright, a third one was wounded in the head, the fourth managed to shoot von Fritsch in the head and heart. The man who killed von Fritsch was himself shot dead by his victim, who fired from the ground. That is how von Fritsch 'fell for Führer and Fatherland'. Immediately after his death the S.S. formations were handed a story that was intended to be a justification for the murder. Von Fritsch, ran this account, criticised the ruthless use of Panzer battalions, which were running down women and children with their tanks in their advance towards Warsaw. It was sought to brand von Fritsch as a weakling who would be liable at any time to hinder the advance of the German Army; and it is significant that at that time the story was only given to the S.S. formations who had provided the murderers.

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At the state funeral granted by Hitler to the former Commander-in-Chief von Brauchitsch made an oration that came near to being a condemnation of Hitler and his gang.

It has been suggested that in a last flickering of personal friendship he cared little what happened to himself, having set his mind exclusively on defending the honour of his dead brother officer. Unhappily no such high motive can be attributed to him; he was merely safeguarding himself against an intended double-crossing by Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, Hess and Ribbentrop, who had set their minds on reaping the moral harvest of the Polish victory, whilst von Brauchitsch, looking forward to conducting the French campaign the next year, was not inclined to brook any interference from such civilians. He also wanted to be in a strong position to deal with the armed S.S. formations, which had appeared inside Germany in increasing strength, and he intended to press his demands that these formations should take part in the battles to come.

The one man who rebuked Hitler in forthright terms was Field Marshal von Mackensen, the aged retired officer who had held high command in the Great War, and who was known alike for his mediocre capacity and his uncouth manners. Von Mackensen, who owed his reputation and his place during the First World War to Hans von Seeckt, his Chief-of-Staff, had been greatly impressed by von Seeckt's reports of von Fritsch. By sheer accident he had come into possession of the real facts relating to von Fritsch's 'heroic death', and he was the more shocked because he had lived in a world in which the shooting of a general of the German Army by members of the secret police was inconceivable. When he celebrated his 90th birthday he accused Hitler in front of a large party of being responsible for the death of von Fritsch.

The dead Colonel-General left circumstantial evidence of his murderers' motives. Before he volunteered for the artillery regiment in which he met his death in front of Warsaw, he had written what he called his political testament, and had several photocopies made. When he was killed these copies circulated among higher officers of the army on whom they naturally made a deep impression. In this testament von Fritsch was said to have explained his ideas of the limited power that should be given to Hitler and the supreme power that should be retained by the

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generals during the war, so that whatever the outcome they could dismiss Hitler at will.

In the German Army today there are military leaders of high capacity, as this book will show in detail. None of them can claim to rank with von Fritsch. Examination of his original Polish plan, drawn up before the expansion of the German army, makes it clear that even with the relatively small army of the day it might have been possible to crush Poland in a short time. The unprecedented increase of the armed forces of the nation and, what is more important, the maintenance of the high standard of efficiency that had been set in the past, go to von Fritsch's credit. He was probably the military equal of Moltke senior and of Schlieffen. His assassination freed Hitler from his strongest political adversary, but it deprived the German Army of a leader who might have prevented decisions that have brought the German Reich from a prospect of near-victory to certain defeat.

For Germans and for many outside Germany Baron Werner von Fritsch represented, together with others of his clique, the type of Prussian officer who, with all his limitations, still retained a distinction which the Nazis do not possess, either in theory or in practice. The Prussian officer joined hands with the Nazis and to the Nazis the better part of his character succumbed. Though by early training a religious man, von Fritsch did not allow any religious principle to stand in the way of that deadly State necessity which it was his military ideal to serve. Nothing was so sacred to him as his profession and the nationalism that inspired it. He was an exceptionally gifted member of a class which used the German people as an instrument of war as Hitler has done, and the fact that Hitler succeeded better than they by developing their own methods further is their very condemnation. In ways and means von Fritsch may have differed from Hitler and the Party, but their final aim was the same, for he and his kind were not above Hitler in their disregard of human lives, whether the lives of their own people or others.

## **Field Marshal Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt**

*Prussia is not a state that possesses an army; it is an  
army that has conquered a nation.*

MIRABEAU

**G**eneral von Rundstedt is tall and spare, and as he crosses a parade ground his even step suggests both self-command and wiry endurance. The thin, intellectual features might be those of the priest if the outward alertness of the soldier were absent; and there is so little sentiment about him, apart from sentiment with a motive behind it, that his own son ceased to interest him when he chose philosophy as a vocation rather than the army. It is indeed this devotion to the prestige and traditions of his profession that has so limited his wider intellectual development, as it has limited that of countless other men of his caste.

Within his own sphere, however, von Rundstedt's dignity is at once apparent. His force of character may be greater and his decision more incisive because of his lack of humanity in the broader sense. After bending for hours over a large scale map, his keen, melancholy, dark eyes searching and probing, he will rap out his orders in precise, clipped language, dispatching his aides in every direction unconscious of the effect produced by his hard uncouthness, his incidental rudeness that is frequently part of him. Treating all alike whether they are people of importance or of no consequence, he has the courage of his bearing, and will even criticise Hitler the 'civilian' if he should interfere with his professional plans, though he will do all he can to encourage Führer-worship if it means, for instance, the increased strength of his army group.

When involved in any political issue, von Rundstedt lacks diplomacy and personal charm; and knowing his limitations he avoids the issue. Of the needs and conditions of the civilian world outside him he is satisfied to stay in ignorance. It is primarily on

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the battlefield that he is to be reckoned with, for though as a rule working within the scope of his advance plan of operations, in that rigid manner common to every German officer, he has the gift, so rare among his colleagues, of being able at a moment's notice to disengage himself and improvise new tactics.

It is von Rundstedt more than any of Germany's generals who is likely to put a severe tax on the resources of his Allied opponents if he is permitted to remain in command of western Europe.

Field Marshal Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt is the ablest military leader in Hitler's service to-day, accomplished in theory and proved in action, and to him has fallen the leading executive role in the operational plans for the present war laid down by von Seeckt, the first Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, and completed by his most outstanding successor Werner von Fritsch. The oldest German Field Marshal on active service, von Rundstedt, who was born on 12th December 1875, has even more experience of war behind him than had von Fritsch. In peacetime he was probably von Fritsch's nearest rival as a strategist, and since von Fritsch's death his word has become law in the German army, where he has been nicknamed 'the high priest of strategy'.

He was destined for the army while still in the cradle. His family was well known in the so-called Altmark of Brandenburg, and boasted of ancestors who, as independent war lords centuries before, fought the lieutenants of the German Emperor (then seated in Vienna), and the Counts of Hohenzollern who administered these border districts.

After preparation at the local grammar school, von Rundstedt entered the cadet schools of Oranienstein and Grosslichterfelde, and at the age of 17 joined the infantry regiment No. 83 at Kassel as an ensign. As a first lieutenant he passed to the infantry regiment No. 171, also known as the 2nd Upper Alsatian Infantry Regiment: a transfer not made on military grounds alone. He was to strengthen the Prussian element in Alsace and to counter the resistance of the conquered French population which showed no sign of declining. Characteristic of his race in the ruthlessness and narrowness of his political outlook, von Rundstedt was ex-

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pected to set before Alsatian leading families an example of Prussian austerity and gravity worthy of their emulation.

Though in this he failed, the Prussian ideal, even at its best, being repugnant to the Alsatian temperament, he was highly regarded throughout the entire military district of Alsace-Lorraine as a young officer of exceptional gifts. Captain von Rundstedt, as he was now, let it be known that the garrison commander of Colmar consulted him at every opportunity in the preparation of plans of mobilisation which supplemented the general directions issued by the Berlin General Staff. Seconded to the staff of the garrison as aide-de-camp he took his duties lightly enough but became what he liked to call 'the pocket edition of a chief of staff'. His transfer to the General Staff in Berlin was then a matter of time.

During the last war he occupied the important post of Chief of Staff of the XV Army Corps and served in this command on the eastern and western fronts for a brief spell; then he was transferred to the Turkish General Staff and did much to help in its urgent work of reorganisation.

In these offices of distinction he never forgot that his father had been a major-general of the arch-junker class of Brandenburg-Prussia, especially when less gifted colleagues, whose blood might have done more for them than their brains, jealously raked up the fact that his mother had been a simple bourgeois with the maiden name of Adelheidt Fischer. Von Rundstedt himself had married in 1902, and had been careful to select his wife for her family's aristocratic background. Though his father-in-law was only a major, he rejoiced in the name of von Götz, while his mother-in-law was a baroness, born a von Schlotheim—a name so typically aristocratic that it used to serve for the romantic heroes of six-penny love stories written for parlourmaids.

It was the nature of von Rundstedt to desire actual power of command more than rapid promotion in rank, and he remained a major throughout the last war. The Reichswehr could not dispense with such a man, and he was gazetted a lieutenant-colonel in October 1920. Until 1923 he investigated the reasons why the Imperial Army was defeated and he wrote special memoranda on the subject to authorities in Berlin, his conclusions going far beyond the normal intellectual scope of a General

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Staff officer. He examined the economic position of every government that had declared war on Germany and his main conclusion was that the real cause of her military downfall had been the economic power of Great Britain. During later years he often tried to bring political and military persons of importance to the same conclusion.

As a colonel von Rundstedt became Chief of Staff of the 3rd Cavalry Division, which under the command of Lieut.-General Paul Hasse was responsible for the military occupation of Thuringia in 1923. With the excuse of quelling a Communist uprising in that district he went methodically to work to eliminate the danger to men of his own class, both in the army and in heavy industry, that might result from a left-wing or Communist Government in Thuringia. Although they knew him to be a thorough-going Prussian, his ruthlessness surprised even his friends.

Here in central Germany the workers were determined to stop the development of those reactionary elements whose traditional purpose was to thwart and nullify the Weimar constitution. The majority of the population of Thuringia sympathised with the workers whose battalions were well prepared for an open conflict with their former lords and masters who, like the Bourbons, had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Von Rundstedt answered their assertion of rights with machine-guns, and, with a lightning redistribution of his troops, he smothered all resistance at the outset.

With the military power of the left-wing groups thus liquidated, von Rundstedt tried his hand at internal politics for the first time by staging a so-called general election in Thuringia under the bayonets and guns of his division, with the result that within a few months the province was reckoned one of the most nationalistic and reactionary inside Germany. This election gave birth to the group of Reichstag deputies who formed a centre of obstruction to any further socialistic developments, saw to it that the activities of the army were sufficiently camouflaged, and never forgot to whom they owed their position. Von Rundstedt, together with General Hasse, had sworn an oath of allegiance to the constitution of the German Republic, and thus formally acknowledged that it was by the authority of the Government he had been charged with main-

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taining peace and order in Thuringia. His conception of his task was such that he protected and even instigated movements against the constitution to which he was pledged, always defending his measures with the formula that whatever action the Thuringian representatives might take against the Reich Government and against the constitution, he had only done his military duty.

Von Rundstedt, recognising no loyalty but to the army, considered it consistent with his honour to be disloyal to the government he served. It was a standard that was taken as a precedent by many other officers, who felt that if a man of von Rundstedt's military reputation could adopt such a line in political matters, they would be perfectly correct in following his example. The alternative, indeed, would have been much more difficult for them, the influence of the army on their lives being far more powerful than that of the civil government. Thus to the military credit he had earned, von Rundstedt now added the reputation of being a 'stout nationalist'. Under the existing regime this meant a long spell of pretence and hypocrisy for the great majority of the Reichswehr officers, while for those responsible for rearmament against the country's Treaty undertakings it necessitated hard lying.

In 1924 von Rundstedt became Chief-of-Staff to the 2nd Army District (Stettin) which position he held for one year. The appointment was given to him as a rest after his political success in Thuringia, for in Pomerania political questions did not hamper purely military affairs. But the matador of the nationalist cause in the ring of Red Thuringia could scarcely rest on his laurels, and a willing audience of retired imperial generals, of big landowners and young ensigns and lieutenants, responded with flattering applause to the now larger views of their new Chief-of-Staff. Von Rundstedt continued to dabble in politics, this time on a larger scale. Pomerania had the reputation of being the most militaristic province in Prussia. It had in peace-time supplied the Imperial Army with a number of first class cavalry and infantry regiments, notably grenadiers, but now, with the limitation of armaments, the Reichswehr garrisons in Pomerania were few and scattered. By a subtle and effective propaganda campaign von Rundstedt won new support for his political and military aims, and urged on assemblies of professors and teachers that if the youth of Pomerania were trained in military bodies, officially or unofficially, they



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would escape the 'breath of socialist devilry', and would not be infected by the poison spread by people he called 'apostles of Marx and helpmates of a hell compared with which Dante's Inferno would be child's play'. In such figures of speech he pictured his own government in Berlin and the constitution of the German Republic, which prescribed to him, as Chief-of-Staff of an army district, the duty of seeing that officers and men under his command and that of his commanding general should faithfully observe the obligations they had undertaken when entering the army of the Republic. That year of his in Pomerania was nothing but a continuous breach of the oath that he had voluntarily undertaken five years before.

In 1925 he was transferred again and took over command of the 18th Infantry Regiment in Paderborn, a post he held until 1927. These years as a mere colonel of an infantry regiment had been forced upon him by his friends in the Reichswehr Ministry because he had been rather careless and over-confident in Stettin in 1924, and it was thought wise that one politically so committed should 'disappear' for some years until the future of the Reich should be more clearly defined. Caring little about the regiment under his command, von Rundstedt employed himself usefully in preparing for the events he foresaw and the ambitious part he hoped to take in guiding them. He studied the strategy of other armies, especially of the French and the Russian; and at the same time was privately supplying the camouflaged general staff in Berlin with schemes of manoeuvre built up on the real operational plans that lay in the safes of the Reichswehr Ministry. It has been said of these plans that they provided for the very last detail of the organisation and timing of as many as 500 units and formations in one operation, and are remarkable for their particular stress on mechanisation in transport and attack.

The value placed on them by the Reichswehr explains the unusual distinction conferred on this colonel of an infantry regiment when in 1927 he was chosen to become Chief-of-Staff of Group Command II in Kassel. The Group Command was one of the most important commands below the office of the Commander-in-Chief in Berlin. It exercised military power over the whole of western Germany, and to a large extent supervised preparations for the turnover of industry from peace to war, the

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construction of shadow factories and so forth. Up to the time of von Rundstedt's appointment the generals and Chiefs-of-Staff of the Army Group Command II had found difficulty in persuading industries to accept machine tools that would easily turn out modern armaments. The political atmosphere in the Ruhr district, in south-western and central Germany had not been favourable for such a plan on a larger scale. Von Rundstedt changed that. As a major-general he travelled up and down the area under his command and held conferences with important industrialists with whom he discussed subjects that caused even his immediate superior, General of Infantry Walter Reinhardt, to shudder. In fact, Reinhardt tried to put a brake on the activity of his ambitious Chief-of-Staff. He was not averse to this activity, which was useful to himself and his friends in increasing the armed strength of Germany, first against foreign powers, and secondly as an instrument of internal nationalist policy; but he was afraid, and as younger Reichswehr officers cynically put it, he sometimes even had scruples in continuing his violation of the oath of allegiance he had sworn.

Consequently complaints poured into the Reichswehr Ministry, signed by von Rundstedt himself, stating in plain terms that it was impossible to work under a chief whose courage was not equal to his task. Thus he took direction into his own hands, and it is symptomatic of the influence he had acquired that before appointing a successor to Reinhardt the Reichswehr Ministry despatched a confidential messenger to him to ask for his advice. He actually chose his own superior, who turned out to be Baron Kress von Kressenstein senior, an old reactionary who was an ideal choice for the purpose. Scruples concerning the means by which the military cause could be served did not exist for the Baron. He was delighted with the progress his Chief-of-Staff had made.

Von Rundstedt, of course, had friends in Berlin. It would have been impossible for him to pull strings at the War Office so effectively if it had not been for his bosom friend von Schleicher, the chief conspirator and intriguer in the capital. It was von Schleicher who saw to it that von Rundstedt was given the command of the 2nd Cavalry Division in Breslau in January 1929, where again he threw himself into illegal preparation for the expansion of the

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armed forces. As Chief-of-Staff of Group Command II he had to deal mainly with industry; now as Chief of the 2nd Cavalry Division he was more concerned with the man-power and the resources upon which the Reichswehr could draw in case of emergency. He professed that in the descent on Poland he might be forced to call upon trained reserves at shortest notice; that was his explanation in confidential conferences with the Reich Government in Berlin; but there was a more immediate reason. The district of the 2nd Cavalry Division forms a strategic key to the capital of the Reich, where a severe internal political struggle was going on. The nationalist elements thought that the time would come soon when they could step out into the open for the execution of their ambitious plans and dispose of any Socialist or Democratic Government in Berlin. The reactionary conservative elements under the leader Hugenberg, who had probably the closest link with the Reichswehr, had come to the conclusion that, though they might gain considerably through elections, the support they could get would never suffice to form a government of their own and that only by a military *coup d'état* could they 'rectify an otherwise impossible situation in Berlin' (von Schleicher). Von Rundstedt himself never forgot that any increase of the army would work for internal domination, though he only referred openly to the defence of the country against potential enemies.

Events came nearly to a climax when in 1931 he was appointed Commander of the 3rd Army District in succession to General Joachim von Stülpnagel, because in this office he was the virtual dictator—though only in case of emergency—of Berlin. The ambitious General von Stülpnagel, though politically hand in glove with von Schleicher, had impetuously overstepped the mark by referring to himself as the probable Chancellor-designate of a future nationalist government, an assumption that did not fit into von Schleicher's own private plans.

A year later von Rundstedt became Commander-in-Chief of Group Command I and thus senior officer in the Berlin and central and eastern German districts. By this time both Army and nationalist leaders thought that events were ripe for action, and that the capable Roman Catholic Chancellor Brüning could be replaced. It was through an incredible stroke of intrigue that

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Brüning was deprived of office by the aged President von Hindenburg, and Franz von Papen appointed Chancellor, whilst a certain Herr Bracht became Reich Minister of the Interior. Bracht's capacity as a statesman and his consciousness of the urgency of the moment may be gauged by a decree wherein he laid down the exact number of centimetres of bare skin bathers were allowed to expose. Perhaps in this he was not so naïve as he seemed. The Government were acutely embarrassed and popular attention had to be distracted.

Brüning, though profoundly shocked at this lack of confidence by a President whom he had just assisted in attaining a second term of office, retired without protest. The political power in Prussia, however, was still in the hands of the Social Democratic Party, and the Prime Minister of Prussia, Herr Braun, together with the Minister of the Interior, Karl Severing, had a stronghold of considerable weight in the persons of the President of the Berlin Police, Grzesinski, and his able Vice-President Dr. Weiss. Although the Prussian ministers had already made large concessions to the Reichswehr, especially in connection with the security of the country, they were now unwilling to yield further. For at last they saw that the expansion of the Reichswehr and the army's encroachment on political government were directed especially against themselves, and only as a secondary consideration concerned with any foreign danger.

With courage that surprised the protagonists of the army, not to speak of von Papen, who thought that the game had been lost, both Braun and Severing barricaded themselves in their ministries and surrounded them with strong bodies of local police who were nearly as well armed as the Reichswehr infantry. Then on the 20th July 1932 von Rundstedt declared a state of siege, and Braun, Severing and Grzesinski surrendered to the proverbial lieutenant and platoon and were transported to the officers' detention barracks. Possibly the only man who would have answered this flagrant breach of constitutional rights with equal firmness was Karl Severing, but his voice was not heard. Von Rundstedt addressed the population of Berlin saying he would be 'as mild as possible if my wishes are obeyed during this stage of emergency in Berlin', but that he would ruthlessly employ force to break any resistance. To the German and foreign

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press he explained that he could see nobody, and refused to appear before them.

Privately he fell into bathos and explained: 'I might be caricatured by some of the cartoonists', and that would never do for a Prussian general. He hated publicity, which he called 'hot air', and never was on a good footing with the press. Though it might be argued that the persons officially most responsible for these acts were President Hindenburg and Chancellor von Papen, it is undeniable that the Reichswehr commanders involved, and above all von Rundstedt, were the ready instruments in what was in fact a bloodless revolt against the constituted State authority. Von Rundstedt later admitted that the order to arrest the legitimate government of Prussia did not cause him so much as ten minutes loss of sleep.

Once the *coup d'état* had succeeded von Rundstedt advocated the dismissal of the rather unpractical von Papen, who, he thought, would let slip the fruits of victory; and it was mainly through the strong support of the Commander of Army Group I that General Kurt von Schleicher assumed the Chancellorship. Thus for the first time the man who had hitherto used the heads of German Governments like marionettes on a string, took over the responsibility himself. It was a false step. Von Schleicher was refused support by all political parties in Germany and especially by the strong Nazi Party.

It was now probable that the internal war which had been waged by the army against the Socialist and Democratic Governments would become one between the army and the National Socialist Party. But after a careful review of the past and an effort to assess what might happen in the future, von Schleicher thought it better to retire. He saw it would be impossible to carry out a large-scale programme of rearmament and army expansion with a National Socialist majority in the Reichstag, and this conclusion was further influenced by the moral and physical weakness of the Socialist and Democratic parties. Not all their leaders had been proof against the army's appeals to their nationalism, and their Government had never controlled a force that could stand up against any threat of action by the army. Although the Storm Trooper organisation of the Nazi Party was far from being armed, it had been drilled and was ready to receive machine-guns and even

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artillery, which would make it a stronger threat against any opposition than could be summoned by the Socialist Democratic deputies. The army leaders, of course, had been quite content to see the Social Democrats choose the Reichstag as the arena in which to settle their differences and quarrels.

The first Hitler Cabinet was now formed after the President had consulted with von Schleicher and the commanding generals of the Reichswehr, which, under the constitution, had no authority in the matter. Von Schleicher gave his blessing to this Cabinet because he was certain that the General Officer commanding the Army Group I, General von Rundstedt, would at any time be in a position to act again as the army's faithful watch-dog, and nobody in the Reichswehr had any doubt that if called upon to do so von Rundstedt would repeat the operation which, for his own ends and those of his friends, he had carried out in 1923 in Thuringia.

The pressing demands of the army to dispose somehow or other of the increasing power of the Storm Troopers and the ambitious designs of their Chief-of-Staff were largely based on the feeling of security they had in von Rundstedt, who was always there with a considerable armed power at his hand as a last means of argument, and von Rundstedt himself never pretended that he was not ready to act as expected. It was at this moment that the Nazi Party Cabinet ministers and higher leaders of the Storm Troopers were seeking to enter the more exclusive social circles of Berlin, and, in his capacity as Group Commander, von Rundstedt ought to have accepted them. He flatly refused. To an outsider such conduct on the part of an important German army leader may not readily be understood, for obviously a political platform had now been constructed upon which larger plans for an expansion of the army could be put into practice. Certainly neither the Government nor any section of the population would have offered any criticism of rearmament. Such opposition as had been offered at any time under the new regime had been feeble, for it came only from individuals. All the army leaders had longed for in the fifteen years since the Armistice had been achieved. But now the real character of men like von Rundstedt came to the surface.

Whatever the generals thought of Germany, the German

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community or the security of the Reich, their principal concern was to put again into power the caste that had always controlled the army, which had been not only the instrument of Government but the directing power behind it as well as the dominant influence in the German social system. For this was a class struggle. The new National Socialist Government loudly claimed, before the German nation and the world, that it would break down all barriers of class distinction inside Germany, and that in time every man would be put into the position he had the capacity to fill. That was the appeal made to the people, and it not only served the Nazi purpose within Germany but deluded many outside. The worst of the most immediate of Nazi aims was to force the whole of industrial Germany into the service of a war machine that would be directed by Hitler and his handymen. Incidental to this would be a new hierarchy and its personal aggrandisement, and the long crescendo of savagery entailed in crushing opposition.

All this seemed to suit von Rundstedt and his friends, for they reckoned on being able to re-direct power into their own hands, where according to their traditional scheme of things it belonged. To them the Nazi clique were upstarts, and that label disposed of them without much examination of their aims. And while the Nazis prepared and lured the credulous who disregarded German history into believing in their peaceful intentions, the von Rundstedts won the sympathy of their opposite numbers abroad with their claim to be simple German patriots watching only for the danger in the east.

Henceforth von Rundstedt, as Commander-in-Chief of Army Group I, made it plain that if Göring's State Police could not deal with the Roehm followers he would at a minute's call provide the firing squads. But Nazis and Junkers were not united in their sinister purposes, for when General Kurt von Schleicher and his wife and others were murdered with a reckless disregard for law and order that might well have given alarm to other high officers, von Rundstedt was not moved to show condemnation. His own predominant position had been relieved of the immediate threat from Roehm and his staff organisation in Munich and Berlin, which commanded millions of potential soldiers who might have been turned against the regular army.

The 'brown dirt', as von Rundstedt described it, having been

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cleared up, he settled down again to the expansion of the new training for the troops under his command. In contrast to many of the leading generals, he had been an infantry specialist, and as such was likely to be rather backward in his views, or so people thought who did not know him well. They soon learned better. While other departments in the Reichswehr busied themselves with questions of Panzers, of artillery, of aircraft collaboration and many hundred other of the important and indeed vital improvements and repairs in armaments, Rundstedt made it his job to increase the striking power of the mass of the German army, the infantry. Reforms made effective on the ground of urgency centred in the following considerations.

It was impossible to send infantry into battle under the conditions of the last war. The automatic arms of the heavier support given at that time to riflemen were obviously inadequate. Never again must charging infantry become easy prey for the increased automatic arms of other branches, of the more deadly attack from the air, from heavy artillery and the fire and speed of the tank. Therefore Rundstedt suggested and then put into practice a complete re-organisation of this branch of the army. The infantry company received twelve machine-guns, three light mortars and an unspecified amount of anti-tank weapons. Thus the armament of the individual company was heavier than the armament of an entire regiment during the last war. The infantry regiment comprised three machine-gun companies instead of one as in the last war, six extremely heavy mortars, a communication platoon, an engineer platoon, a cavalry squadron, a close support gun battery and a comparatively strong anti-tank company. The organisation of the entire regiment was protected by anti-aircraft of light and medium calibre.

The increase in heavy armament for the infantry regiment involved the question of its transport. As the transport had to be moved at the speed of the individual rifleman, horse-drawn vehicles were used to a large extent. Only in action where quick change of position and fast transport were necessary was motorisation adopted, this being almost exclusively in the anti-tank company and the anti-aircraft batteries. For the rest of their heavy weapons the infantry had under its command horses exceeding in number those of a cavalry regiment during the last war, which



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explains the large purchases of cavalry horses in England and other countries before the outbreak of the second world war.

The usual formations attached to the headquarters of an infantry regiment were strengthened, and particular care was taken by von Rundstedt to make the commander of an infantry division fairly independent as regards engineers. Pontoons, labour sections, motor saws for felling trees, flame-throwing companies and so forth became a standard issue for this division. The anti-aircraft artillery was considerably reinforced, and throughout the entire divisional structure a certain number of machine-guns was permanently allotted to anti-aircraft groups.

These changes required all leaders and their men to be fully acquainted with their material, and to know how to put it to the best tactical advantage in the field. N.C.O.s especially had to be given more individual training than before, and here von Rundstedt was up against a difficulty. The soldiers he commanded, and especially the riflemen, had been through a school centuries old which relied on strict obedience and discipline rather than individual thinking. The reputation of the Prussian Grenadier was founded on the fact that he would execute orders under the heaviest fire without batting an eyelid. The disregard for human life on the part of the command and willingness to die as the duty of the soldier were the fundamental pillars of this reputation. But with modern armament this ideal was changed.

Von Rundstedt demanded special N.C.O. schools and got them. He demanded a special propaganda campaign to break down the belief that infantry must be sacrificed in fighting against automatic arms. In this way he sought to dispel the 'neurosis against the machine-gun hail', as he called it, and he was successful. When in the German Army there grew up a tendency to believe that mechanisation alone could achieve the speedy victories demanded, he was able to re-direct the outlook of the persons responsible and to confine the tank specialists to their own tasks. He demanded that even the ordinary infantry should be transported by lorries, supplied to them as occasion arose by the Service Corps of the army or by vehicles commandeered inside Germany or by the countries to be occupied. This explains why the majority of incoming recruits after 1935 were still finding their place either in the infantry or its incorporated arms, and

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naturally the spokesman of this army thereby increased his standing and his power.

Once these questions had been settled—and they had been regarded as only tactical details in the larger strategy—von Rundstedt made it his job to enlighten the General Staff officers, and the officers under training for that appointment, on the art of higher leadership. He inculcated the belief that whatever technical science produced in improved armaments, however good the results that officers of the more technical motorised formations could produce, they all depended in the end on the man who had to break down the final resistance, the rifleman. Fundamental in the training of the General Staff officer, therefore, must be the assumption that while the rifleman could march generally at a 4-5 miles speed, he could travel at a pace of 40-50 miles if his General Staff officer gave him the transport he needed. But what would be the use, von Rundstedt argued, of an army that could only travel at high speed when it was forced to meet resistance and penetrate that resistance at the rate, probably, of one or two miles per hour? The cumbersome vehicles and troops not used to hard infantry fighting would then become sitting targets for a spectacular slaughter.

The years 1935-7 saw von Rundstedt concentrating on this theory, and within those years he accomplished work which under more normal circumstances might have occupied another commander for decades. His manoeuvres were always based on the assumption that the speed of the infantry could be switched from one moment to another from four miles to forty or *vice versa*, and the time-tables and details of organisation and preparation that as a consequence had to be prepared under his care became the pattern which other high leaders had to follow; they became the standard conception in the new German Army.

By the end of 1937 von Rundstedt found time to pay special visits to staff colleges and other training schools for higher officers, and now more than ever he insisted upon a clear recognition of what had led to the downfall of the old German Imperial Army in 1918. One of his most striking utterances was made when he addressed an assembly of General Staff officers on a special course in 1937:

‘From the very beginning Germany’s chance of victory lay

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in the possibility of keeping up a mobile warfare against the Allies. When stalemate came on the western front it should have been the first duty of the German Imperial General Staff to start mobile warfare afresh in the spring of 1915, instead of which the efforts to regain the initiative were postponed to a date in 1918 when the American aid to the Allies was smashing all hope of victory for the German Army. Time always works against any Continental power at war with England; that has been proved in the past, and is entirely true to-day, when highly developed armament industries depend more than ever on overseas imports of raw material. A Continental power wishing to defeat England must have either Russia or the United States as an ally in order to have any chance of victory. If this constellation cannot be obtained, then England must be an ally of any power aiming at predominance on the Continent. She must not be neutral, for even as a neutral she can turn the scales of victory as may suit her convenience. The lesson to be learned from this is that land power is useless if not coupled with command of the sea. But sea-power alone can strangle a Continental power in the long run.'

As leading exponent of this school of thought, von Rundstedt vainly demanded that the Reich Cabinet should reassure itself about the position of England in any future war. The attitude of the British Government before the German invasion of Poland completely misled the German experts on these matters; in fact, von Ribbentrop's personal experiences in England and his subsequent handling of German foreign affairs made the German Government believe that England would never fight again. This 'expert' opinion was handed with the full authority of the Cabinet to the General Staff, and to such leading men as von Rundstedt and others; and whilst it was very generally accepted, von Rundstedt remained sceptical. He, like General Walther von Brauchitsch, was opposed to any armed conflict with England, and he never tired of pointing out the deep gulf between the mentality of the insular English and that of the Germans, who were apt to be deluded about the potentialities of their 'cousins across the Channel', as von Rundstedt liked to refer to the British. Though he could not produce any concrete evidence, on many occasions he expressed the feeling that England might adopt

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an attitude considerably different from that which von Ribbentrop and his friends predicted. He was never entirely convinced by that wishful thinking which regarded the English as degenerate pacifists and weaklings. This attitude did not imply any particular sympathy for England, and he was no advocate of British-German collaboration: his motives were guided more by the fear that German plans for world domination might receive a severe setback at the most inopportune and unexpected moment.

When in September 1939 Mr Chamberlain at last called a halt to the German Government with the alternative of war, von Rundstedt found this fear realised and his judgment confirmed. His views were founded on a thorough and intimate study of latent British power, which, if time permitted, would spell the same end for Germany as in the last war. He was never much concerned, of course, about any immediate danger to the German armed forces from the British, but he understood what her gathered strength meant on the sea and in the field as the war developed.

His close association with von Fritsch during the critical days of the spring of 1938, had led to his retirement during the greater part of 1939. Under the Nazis it was to be expected that a soldier who dreamed of a world dominated by Junker rather than Nazi Germans should be placed on the retired list. Nevertheless at the outbreak of war there was no question about who would be the leader of the first and most important army groups in the field, and von Rundstedt was recalled. There must have been a tacit agreement that the differences in opinion disclosed in 1938 should be allowed to rest during hostilities.

Commanding the German Army Group South that advanced from the eastern tip of Slovakia, von Rundstedt overcame the Polish forces in the sector Cracow-Lemberg, then broke into the southern Polish defence in the triangle of Kutnov, which he out-flanked, and so decided the Polish campaign. He took Warsaw, and has been credited with the rapidity of final victory in Poland. At the beginning of that campaign there were certain phases of which the Germans can scarcely be proud. There was a stage when von Bock had run his divisions against an almost solid resistance on the part of gallant and determined Poles, and even his frontal attacks resulted in nothing but heavy casualties. It was von Rundstedt's execution of an almost flawless opera-

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tion that kept the time-table which had been set for the campaign by the late Colonel General von Fritsch.

Once Warsaw had fallen, von Rundstedt saw his task achieved, and rather contemptuously attended the ceremonies that marked the entry of the German troops into the capital. When at the beginning of October 1939 Hitler arrived at the airport of Warsaw with the Prussian General von Kochenhausen and Major-General Rommel, the Commander of the General Headquarters, to supervise preparations for his triumphal entry into the city, von Rundstedt dismissed the entire affair as an *'Affentheater'* (mock stage), and spoke his mind incisively to Heydrich, second-in-command of the by then all-powerful Gestapo, who had been very much in favour of elaborate preparations for Hitler's ostentatious entry into the enemy's capital. Nevertheless, both von Rundstedt and Blaskowitz had to supervise arrangements for the march past, and both made biting comparisons between these meticulous preparations and the work they had had to do to reach Warsaw at all.

After the conquest of Poland the situation in the east was regarded as anything but stable, and during the winter of 1939-40 von Rundstedt was appointed military governor of Poland, which implied nothing less than German preparation for any 'eventualities' in connection with Soviet Russia. He turned a blind eye to the malevolent activities of Frank, the civil governor of Poland, and had as much regard for the lives of the Polish population as for the wild bears and wolves he was shooting in the virgin forests in the heart of Poland.

In 1940 von Rundstedt was put in charge of Army Group A. This command covered the centre of the front against Belgium and France, and its forces advanced over the Maas, and played an important part in Flanders and Artois up to the Channel coast in the first part of the campaign against France. During the second part he pierced the Weygand line on the Aisne and Marne, opening the way for further Panzer attacks into the rear of the Maginot Line. The development of operations in the west had shown he was right—in the military sense—in putting special emphasis on the modernisation and expansion of the infantry, for it was the preparatory operations of the infantry alone, with its main and diversionary attacks, which in each sector opened

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the way for the Panzer divisions.

At the beginning of the Russian campaign in 1941 von Rundstedt was given a command similar to the one he had held in Poland. Again he covered the central army group and was commander-in-chief of the Army Group South. Here there were indications of possible difficulties for him, because under his command he had Hungarian and Rumanian formations, a large percentage of former Austrian units and some important divisions of the German armed forces proper. At first he was severely hampered by the destruction of important strategical communication junctions inside Rumania, caused partly by accurate Russian bombing, partly by the efficient work of the Russian intelligence service, and his operations were in danger of being completely paralysed by these setbacks. Yet in spite of this von Rundstedt, with an Army Group comprising four separate armies with a total strength of from 40 to 50 divisions, put through an operation that has been considered the most flawless and brilliantly executed of prepared plans. In swift strokes he forced Marshal Budjenny back, and it stands greatly to the credit of the Soviet leader that he was not forced within a few days to surrender the major part of the army under his command. He did splendid work in extricating his troops from the most difficult positions into which he was forced by von Rundstedt.

All the more credit must be given to von Rundstedt because of two factors of considerable importance which worked against him. One arose from the clumsy dispositions of General von Kleist, his chief armoured formation commander. Von Kleist, whom we shall meet later and criticise in detail, was recognised as a complete failure, both as a general and as a disciplinarian. The second adverse factor was that on more than one occasion Rumanian ancillary troops acted on ideas of their own. Moreover their standard of equipment, their organisation, their staff work were far below the standard to which von Rundstedt was accustomed, and caused increasing difficulties inside his Army Group command.

Von Bock advanced in the centre, confident in the knowledge that his southern flank would be well protected by von Rundstedt. Not only was this confidence fully justified, but von Rundstedt went beyond his defensive role by seizing unexpected opportuni-

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ties for attack. On approximately 25th August 1941 he saw the chance of waging a battle or series of battles that might bring about the collapse of the military organisation of the Red Army. In fact he saw the opportunity for which the operational plans of the German General Staff had originally been planned, and which anticipated a quick victory once the first frontier battles had been fought and the majority of Russian divisions had been defeated. This opportunity seemed to occur in the Gomel and Kiev sector. Von Rundstedt directed that the right flank of von Bock's Army Group should separate from his own left flank, should quickly bypass the Russian resistance, and then join him again, so encircling the great majority of the Russian forces. Von Bock's eyes, however, were fixed on a more centrally situated and spectacular objective: the speedy conquest of Moscow; and as Hitler and the supreme staffs were mostly at von Bock's Army Group the encircling operation did not result as von Rundstedt had planned.

It has been reported that von Rundstedt openly accused von Bock of negligence by delaying the capture of Kiev for five weeks, during which the majority of Budjenny's field forces escaped. When in September Kiev was captured, and the busy Dr. Goebbels trumpeted the capture of four armies under Budjenny's command, von Rundstedt must have mocked at the claim. He knew better. It was during this operation that he recognised the skill of Marshal Timoshenko, who had despatched to the scene one of his ablest lieutenants, General Dobroserdov. In this leader von Rundstedt met his match.

After the capture of Kiev, which gained him a valuable base but not the higher strategical objective of smashing the major part of the Russian armed forces, the main German effort shifted more than ever to the central sector, with Moscow as the prize. Von Bock's failure here was conspicuous. At the same time von Rundstedt's 'black sheep', von Kleist, managed by intrigue and by pulling strings to claim a victory for himself which, though a considerable force of the Russian army was involved, was of not more than local value. In the Battle of Uman a considerable Russian force was captured which impressed von Rundstedt a great deal less than it did Hitler and his advisers at General Headquarters. Later, when von Bock's failure almost resulted in

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the rout of the German forces before Moscow it was von Rundstedt who was called in to clear up the mess.

It was thought adequate to leave von Kleist, the 'victor' of Uman, in charge of the important southern army group. Von Rundstedt had left him a perfectly stable front, and it was obvious that though an early capture of Rostov would be welcome, it was not of vital necessity. The season had progressed, and positions for further operations in 1942 had been gained by von Rundstedt in the south. The ambitious von Kleist thought differently, and his ensuing operations rather spoiled the effect of von Rundstedt's strategy. He rushed forward to Rostov, and by extremely unskilful manoeuvring—especially by his inability to recognise at an early date the disposition of Russian reserves—suffered a severe defeat. Von Rundstedt was now too busy on the central sector to lend any assistance to von Kleist. Thus the end of the southern campaign of the year 1941 was not wholly satisfactory, though not through any fault of von Rundstedt's.

The abilities of von Rundstedt had by that time proved themselves to be the best at Hitler's disposal, and completely overshadowed the achievements of the northern army group commander, Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb, who as a military leader came nearest to von Rundstedt. By March 1942 von Rundstedt's leadership was unrivalled in the German Army, and his pre-eminence was recognised when he presided over a strategic conference in Berlin in March 1942. That year he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his entry into the German Army, and Hitler marked the occasion by a letter he wrote him in which he showed his awareness of the dangers gathering about his own position if he gave too much credit to the man who had established himself as the ablest German general of the war. The letter was written in diplomatic language congratulating the Field Marshal, but put rather less emphasis on his ability and his achievements than was due.

The conference in Berlin laid down the steps for future offensive operations in the east and reviewed the situation in the west created by the increasing might of Britain and the possibility of an invasion of Europe. Von Rundstedt must by this time have seen clearly that Germany could not achieve the early military decision she had hoped for, and he was probably already in doubt about



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the issue of the entire war. The Blitzkrieg of the early stages was over. The excitement of the initial victories had died down, and there were already so many symptoms of lawlessness that he was impelled to issue a stern warning. His Order of the Day of 25th March 1942 said:

'The conceptions of mine and thine are becoming confused.

Even the private property of the crews of our tanks which have been put out of action is being stolen.'

Such behaviour among German troops should not be associated with a cracking in spirit; it referred in this case to the looting and thieving that went on during the occupation of western Russia. The High Command were not troubled about it; every general was willing to allow some licence to the German soldier as a reward. And it would be equally wrong to suppose that von Rundstedt was concerned with high moral principles. He thought—and had expressed himself in that sense in peace-time—that if the soldiery were permitted to steal as they liked from occupied territories they would lose restraint among comrades, and increasing relaxation of discipline would affect military efficiency. It is one of the most closely guarded secrets of the German Army that many of its officers and men were court-martialled and put to death during this period, but it is known that von Rundstedt treated his own soldiers as severely as he treated the workers of Thuringia in 1923; in fact even more harshly and with less discrimination. The practical result was to check looting between comrades and the unsoldierly spirit that gave rise to it.

Once operational plans for the 1942 offensive against Russia were laid down, von Bock, Paulus, Kothe-Hoth, von Mannstein and others were entrusted with their execution in the field. Von Rundstedt, true to his preconceived ideas, considered the situation in the west to be equally important. Everyone knew, civilians in high government positions and military leaders alike, that he was conspicuous among those who had never underestimated Britain's potential power, which by this time was having its effect. Hitler's anxiety to keep a definite balance of power and reputation among his civilian and military lieutenants now became apparent once more. Von Rundstedt was taken at his word about his warnings in the west, and was subsequently sent to France to take over the post of Commander-in-Chief in that area from Colonel

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General Dollman, who owed his appointment largely to his standing as a specialist on super-heavy and long-range artillery established on the Channel coast. Von Rundstedt commanded roughly 20 to 25 divisions in Holland, Belgium and France, and several small fully mechanised divisions. One of his first steps as Commander-in-Chief, Western Occupied Countries, was to meet Grand Admiral Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, with whom he discussed problems of collaboration between Navy and Army. The two had always held similar political views, and they were of one mind on the defence of western Europe, though the Admiral had little assistance to offer.

The troops under von Rundstedt's command had practical experience of his methods after the Allied commando raid on Boulogne. The German propaganda machine reported that he had personally decorated one hundred officers and men with the Iron Cross for their skill and bravery during this engagement. What Dr. Goebbels did not report was that within a few days of the raid von Rundstedt presided over a court martial that condemned 150 officers and men to death, and though one might assume that cowardice was the reason for these executions, it has since been alleged by neutral observers that von Rundstedt went so far as to put responsible officers against the wall for technical mistakes committed during the raid, a procedure unusual even in German-Prussian military records.

For a theatre that was at least temporarily non-operational he could claim only limited reserves, especially as the battle for Stalingrad and the Caucasus was already in full swing. What handicapped him more than anything else was that for the purpose of better mobility of his forces he had to rely almost entirely on the industries of the occupied countries within his command, with only a very meagre part of the output of the Ruhr district. The considerable production of these districts, which in normal times—that is to say, without interference by the R.A.F.—would have been substantial, now became uncertain. Von Rundstedt perforce imposed on himself a limit in the defence of his 'fortress'; in Holland and in a large part of Belgium he relied almost exclusively on static defence works, and even these lacked a good deal of what his experts considered necessary. The German military governor of the Netherlands, the Luftwaffe-General Christiansen,

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for example, depended a good deal on bluff, and on more than one occasion he offered Goebbels facilities for showing neutral correspondents part of the 'gigantic defences' erected under his command. This was done with the full approval of von Rundstedt, who has never despised even the simplest *ruse de guerre*. If one were to accept the reports given out after these conducted tours at their face value Holland would seem to be one mass of defences. In reality the cunning Christiansen toured his guests up and down the country without any maps, and very often they saw part of the same sector again and again. In France proper von Rundstedt had been keeping back a mobile reserve which was less than he needed because its expansion was limited by the declining output of industry. This gives us an indication of the tactics he is likely to adopt against invasion.

Though the Berlin Propaganda Ministry has impressed on Germany and the world that von Rundstedt is the foremost defensive specialist in the German Army (a statement without basis in von Rundstedt's service record), it may safely be predicted that the Field Marshal will conduct his defence on extremely offensive lines. That is to say, he will leave it to the static defences along the Channel coast and along western France down to Spain to delay any Allied combined operation so as to give him time to recognise the main Allied thrust. It will be more in accord with his military ideas if he concentrates a comparatively strong strategical mechanised reserve, which will meet the main Allied attack on ground favourable for the Germans. In an open field battle he might have a chance of turning the scales in his favour. The only alternative would be to separate his troops along the coast, to man all his static defences and try to appear in force along the entire coastline, which would leave him hopelessly outnumbered at any given point and exposed to the fate that his lieutenant von Kleist suffered at Rostov. It would be unwise to rely on such unimaginative tactics from Germany's ablest general. There might be some nasty surprises.

Von Rundstedt's appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Western Occupied Countries, demanded a certain amount of diplomatic activity from him. His dealings with the Vichy Government called for both tact and determination if he were to achieve his object of keeping Laval in power without ceding him any military

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force whatsoever. By way of tact, von Rundstedt harped on the theme that had already been used by poor Marshal Pétain when he was suing for an armistice: the understanding between two experienced professional soldiers—'soldier to soldier', as Keitel grimly repeated. Von Rundstedt was successful in this sphere. For the rest, determination was easy, for there was no serious risk, though there might have been a waste of force. Vichy had no military power, while von Rundstedt commanded a fully-trained and efficient body of men armed with all the up-to-date implements of war. Nevertheless it was undesirable for him to use his power, as that would have meant an unwelcome diversion of his mobile reserves. His policy of tact and good behaviour paid him when he was called on to occupy Vichy territory after the Allied landing in North Africa.

The Axis reverse in North Africa put an additional burden on von Rundstedt's shoulders. The sphere of his activities was extended to the Mediterranean, and he had to take part actively in the planning of the defence of Italy and the Balkans. Criticising could not now help the hard-pressed Afrika Korps, and Rommel, who had enjoyed hitherto great freedom from the direction of the German High Command, had suffered such conspicuous defeats that though Commander-in-Chief of Axis forces in North Africa and still a great hero to the German public, he was now under the supervision of von Rundstedt. The delaying actions fought by Rommel and his skilful staff, assisted von Rundstedt in completing his defence of southern Europe. Had Rommel not given this indirect aid to the larger operation, he could not have expected a single aeroplane or a single ton of supplies after his failures to stand at El Agheila, or Tripoli, or even the Mareth Line. From a tactical viewpoint he was fighting a lost battle, but every gun given him to carry on the fight in North Africa as long as possible meant more time for strengthening the advance guard that protected the European continent.

By January 1943 von Rundstedt was practically the German resident-general in France, and the meagre authority of Pétain and Laval, which had been reduced almost daily since the armistice, had now gone altogether. But while the power of command centred in von Rundstedt was so greatly increased, and his responsibility extended, there was no corresponding increase in the

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means by which his power could be applied. Consequently the German High Command was now obliged to rely more than ever on his skill and cunning.

It was during this period that von Rundstedt made himself felt in Italy. He forced Mussolini to dismiss the commanders of the Aegean Isles, and make drastic changes in the administration of the Italian Army. The late Italian dictator's role in the fighting in North Africa and in other theatres of the war was not a very glorious one, and his dealings with German military leaders were certainly not of the smoothest. Rommel in his relations with the Italians never spared the feelings of Mussolini and his friends, and even his contempt was exceeded by von Rundstedt's. In squaring Pétain there had been something to lose by riding roughshod over dignity and self-respect, for the defeated can become awkward if driven to desperation; but Mussolini's last hope of retaining his standing with the Italians depended on Germany's support. And von Rundstedt shared Kemal Attaturk's opinion of the Duce as 'the bull frog of the Pontine Marshes'.

In conclusion it should be borne in mind that von Rundstedt holds the most responsible post in the German Army, a fact which in itself is indicative of the limitations of German armaments. The High Command has been obliged to gamble, to rely on his resource and skill because of the lack of adequate forces in the field. The writer, having personal knowledge of his military capacity and of the way in which his mind works, believes quite frankly that Hitler has backed the wrong horse. Time will show.

# **Field Marshal**

## **Erwin Eugen Johannes Rommel**

*A good part of the fame of most celebrated men is due  
to the short-sightedness of their admirers.*

G. C. LICHTENSTEIN, REFLECTIONS, 1799

**I**f Rommel were not so anxious to appear the pure Aryan blue-blooded Prussian officer he would fill the part more easily. The role does not come naturally to him. His bearing is too obviously assumed, his politeness, when he considers it is demanded of him, is too ingratiating, and his peculiar, fitful arrogance marks him as a man unsure of himself.

All this induces self-consciousness, for he knows perfectly well that his shortcomings cannot be concealed, and as a commander in the field such a man is bound to lose some of his power with the common soldier. So it was that Goebbels' praise of him in 1941-2 found no echo among the rank and file of the Afrika Korps. They knew him too well from experience: his behaviour was not what they expected from a German officer, and they made no secret of their opinion.

There is nothing fine in Rommel's character. He can be bluff and genial, but his transparent pretentiousness soon loses the confidence of men of any intelligence. So far from possessing religious feeling he flouts the susceptibilities of Catholics and Protestants alike. His contempt often amounted to blasphemy when criticising the expense of the Church's work in the Army; and he has allowed himself to ridicule the rites of a military funeral. He even repudiated the Nordic Cult by which the Party claimed to replace Christianity in Germany.

There can be few who are ignorant of his insufferable conduct in moments of victory, his bragging on the battlefield when things are going well for him: at El Alamein, for example, when the Allies had yet to concentrate their scattered forces and armoured divisions. He had not come within sight of Alexandria and Cairo, he said, but he had flung back again. He would take both those cities, and then

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would seize control of the Suez Canal. Premature success indeed went to Rommel's head in those days.

He is Hitler's general in the purely literal sense of the term, as opposed to von Fritsch and von Rundstedt who are true products of the Imperial Army. He rose because he was tough and determined and because he contrived to get himself into the thick of affairs at a period when stress and change were everywhere and Hitler was looking for clever sword-sharpeners to help him further his own ruthless ends. If finance and not the army had had first place in the new regime, he might have been a company promoter.

Rommel has had no social or financial advantages to help him. The exclusive circles of the Officers' Corps were never open to him in the early days; he could not enter a crack regiment, and he was denied the benefit of a staff training because neither his education nor his intellectual qualifications fitted him for it. At the same time he was not in any way unsympathetic to the Prussian tradition of terrorism and brutality, and he saw nothing distasteful in intriguing and scheming for the main chance, a policy which attracted the adventurers then composing the Nazi hierarchy. Hitler has always needed men like Rommel, especially when they nurse an inward grudge against the orthodox army caste which brooks no rivalry in governing Germany, not even from Hitler himself.

Rommel was born on 15th November 1891 at Heidenheim in Württemberg in southern Germany, where his father was a teacher at the local grammar school. The boy went to the local school, and passed from one class to another with the assistance of his father, who had on more than one occasion to remind the director of the establishment that, after all, young Erwin was going to choose the army as a career, and that to become a subaltern and to be pensioned off as a major he did not need all the education that was necessary for a civilian career.

Rommel was not admitted to a cadet school, but was able to enter the Royal Württembergian Army as an ensign at the age of 19 in 1910. Württemberg was known for a certain liberal interpretation of its recruiting regulations, and the standard required for commissions was not nearly so strict as it was, for example, in Prussia.

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At the outbreak of the war in 1914 he was a platoon commander in the 6th Württemberg Infantry Regiment 'König Wilhelm I' No. 124, and was subsequently a battalion adjutant, with the rank of second lieutenant, but was refused permission to take General Staff courses for which he had applied. He was promoted first lieutenant in March 1915, when he was also decorated with the Iron Cross 1st Class for an exploit in the valley of Dieusson. The action of Dieusson has since been much advertised by the Berlin Propaganda Ministry as one of the first occasions when modern infantry tactics were used by the 'inventor' Rommel. What Rommel actually achieved was a simple outflanking movement. He commanded two platoons, and one morning he was ordered to lead a reconnaissance party to explore the ground in front of the German lines. While doing so he saw that the link between two French companies facing him was extremely weak, and he sent a few sections forward while he himself attacked on the other side of the French position, so creating some confusion behind the French front lines. The French company then surrendered, and Rommel received his Iron Cross 1st Class. It was by no means a rare performance, and was carried out over and over again during the last war by junior officers of both the Allied and German armies, with a difference that was not in Rommel's favour. In the successful action accredited to him, during which he was himself wounded, he lost 80 per cent of his men.

Turned down by the German Flying Corps which he tried to join as an officer observer, he asked for a transfer to a Württembergian Alpine battalion, where he served in most of the operational theatres of the war. He took part in the swift Rumanian campaign under the leadership of Field Marshal von Mackensen, (who reaped laurels won for him by his competent Chief of Staff, Lieut.-Colonel Hans von Seeckt), but found no opportunity of distinguishing himself in the field. During the later campaign in the Carpathians, he was in contact with Austrian formations similar to his own, and he has said that his experiences there filled him with a deep contempt for everything south of the German Reich. When in 1917 the great German-Austrian offensive (which finally resulted in the smashing Italian defeat at Caporetto) was prepared at the Isonzo, Rommel was transferred there with his special Württembergian Alpine troops. The shortage of officers



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amongst these special troops was severe, and so it came about that the young first lieutenant Rommel commanded formations up to the strength of 17 companies. He was put temporarily in charge of what was known at that time as 'mixed formations', but was never given permanent battalion or regimental command.

The devastating effects of the Caporetto defeat upon the Italian army are well known, and both German and Austrian formations made tens of thousands of prisoners in a few hours. It is therefore surprising to learn that Rommel was decorated with the highest German order for bravery, the *Pour le Mérite*—the equivalent of the British V.C.—for the capture of 9,000 Italians who had been completely isolated on a hill. Now in this offensive it was customary to send back Italian prisoners with a small escort, and some 20 or 30 German or Austrian soldiers would escort up to three or four thousand Italians back to stations where they were collected and taken care of. But that was not the way of the careerist. Instead of sending his 9,000 Italians back in batches of two or three thousand, Rommel collected them and their equipment down to the last man and rifle, and then marched back the whole assembly, guarded by the major part of the operational troops in his mixed formation. His report to his senior officer was therefore impressive, and it was not noticed that the large escort he had employed had withdrawn much strength from the front line. Rommel's own reports on Caporetto show the value he placed on publicity even then. He does not underrate his achievements, nor conceal the low opinion he then formed of the fighting qualities of the Italians.

After the demobilisation of the German Army in 1918–19 a man who could show nothing but a *Pour le Mérite* for a particular action without consistent military success was not acceptable to the new Reichswehr leaders, who were very careful to go into the records of their new officers. In fact, there was an unwritten rule at that time that all officers up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel must have belonged to the former German Imperial General Staff. While they did duties as company or battalion commanders their qualifications were noted in the Reichswehr Ministry in Berlin, and they were called upon to pass through their old General Staff training again, so that a nucleus of qualified staff officers was retained for future rearmament. There was no place

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for Rommel in this exclusive clique, nor any chance of getting in by a back door as he had managed to do when trying to enter the more select army circles in his earlier days. The tradition of caste had thwarted him then, and now in addition he was up against a merciless insistence on efficiency. He was, however, to find an unexpected opening.

Without a pension and without a job, he became a student at the technical high school of Tübingen. Nothing is known about his scientific attainments here, but he soon became conspicuous as leader of its first storm trooper section. He was in fact one of the first S.A. leaders in southern Germany. There was one occasion when, while acting in that capacity, he attracted Hitler's attention. The fighting formations of the Nazi Party were not very powerful then, and there was the chance that at any time when they entered a town to stage their political demonstrations they might meet serious opposition. The Chief S.A. commander, Hermann Göring, also a knight of the *Pour le Mérite* Order, was not noticeably successful in overcoming this difficulty, and the only place where the Party chief, Hitler, could speak was Munich, where in the beer cellars a more liberal atmosphere predominated. Hitler wanted to speak all over the country, and S.A. company leader Rommel provided him with his first opportunity.

It was in 1922, on a Sunday morning, when a few hundred storm troopers under Rommel's leadership arrived at the small north Bavarian town of Coburg. Now he had a chance to 'play at strategy'. He surrounded the town, sent parties of shock troops into the streets, beat up the citizens who were just about to go to church, locked the local police in their own station, and then made everybody appear in the market square, where in the meantime Hitler had arrived. The future Führer addressed the good citizens of Coburg in one of his temperamental orations, and they were then forced to line the pavement as spectators of the march past, which was led by Rommel, goose-stepping so well that Hitler remarked: 'That *Pour le Mérite* storm trooper, isn't he every inch a perfect officer?' This was quickly conveyed to Rommel, who, however, was already in flight with his storm troopers to southern Bavaria. When police reinforcements arrived in Coburg not a single storm trooper could be found. They had disappeared as quickly as they had come, and though it was hardly a glorious

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withdrawal both Hitler and Göring were elated by the idea that they had been the virtual dictators of Coburg for at least six hours, and were duly grateful to their little Storm Führer Erwin Rommel.

Rommel soon saw that a continuation of his activity as an organiser for Hitler's mass meetings under storm trooper 'protection' would at best get him a higher rank in that organisation. Undismayed by the rebuff he had received when he applied for a commission in the Reichswehr, his secret desire was still to join the Officers' Corps, and the more he was cold-shouldered the stronger became his ambition. He escaped from those groups that were dominated by minor Nazi officials and began dabbling in strategy. He joined the circle around General Ritter von Epp, a notable Bavarian military theorist, who had developed a scheme of strategy which was later to be adopted by the Reich. For this von Epp had the assistance of Professor Karl Haushofer.

These men were especially interested in the question of the reconquest of the former German colonies, and they looked at the globe with eyes that recognised no limit for Germany's sway. Their fantastic schemes formed exactly the background of sentimental nationalist reaction with the help of which Hitler could expound before excited audiences his ever-changing and expanding popular bait of German world conquest. Among the Reichswehr leaders the Epp-Haushofer circle was regarded as a group of harmless lunatics who were allowed their liberty by an indulgent Government, though there were some, like Ritter von Leeb, the distinguished Bavarian strategist, who thought they should be locked up.

One of the fantastic ideas of the group was the 'pillar' theory, which pictured Germany, England and America acting as the strategic pillars of the world, with the power, if united, to divide it between them. That was the official explanation given out by the circle. Unofficially they wanted to have a secret alliance between America and Germany to defeat Britain, and for them the next stage was that America should first be isolated by an all-powerful Germany, and later defeated by sea and air and finally by land on the American continent.

Professor Haushofer published a series of books dealing with what were known as geo-politics, which were not quite as far-

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fetched as the ideas which he put before Hitler and his followers. Though every German scientist of standing at that time refused to be drawn into a discussion with the professor, and, still more firmly, to have any social contacts with him, Rommel was his credulous pupil. Von Epp and Haushofer had seen visions that stirred him. On more than one occasion he went with Hitler to their meetings, from which both returned to Hitler's flat in Munich to talk and brood over what they had heard.

Rommel was realist enough to see that after the collapse of the Beer Cellar putsch in 1923 it would be years at least before his ambitions could be realised. By pulling strings and by using whatever influence he could bring to bear, he contrived to be put on the official list of the Reichswehr Officers' Corps, though only in a group upon which the army would call when rapid expansion became possible. He also managed to be called up from time to time to serve in various regiments of the Reichswehr, and eventually he became a teacher of tactics at the infantry school in Dresden with the rank of major. Before that he served inconspicuously as a company commander in the Reichswehr.

As major it was his task to teach junior officers how to command small units of platoon or even company strength. This was an admirable opportunity for personal publicity. He illustrated his tactical lessons and training from his memories of the field, and if he could not always give his audiences an example from his own experiences, he was quick to borrow from those of other officers about which he had read. All this helped to make him one of the most popular teachers at the training school. His lessons were not likely to be dull, for sometimes he would describe in colourful terms actions that in more than one instance had taken place only in his imagination.

He was duly given a battalion and was made a lieutenant-colonel. By hard work he had built up a useful reputation, for the officers who had passed through his hands were full of admiration for him as a man who understood young men and was not a stickler for form.

In the meantime political developments favoured Rommel extremely well. He knew how to remind Hitler of his presence. The storm troop leader of the early twenties had now become

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the officer fully versed in modern military science—that, at least, was what he claimed in front of his Führer—and Hitler was impressed. It was not advisable for the German leader to associate himself with von Epp and Haushofer officially, for that might have caused unrest among foreign diplomats, but he often received Rommel at Berchtesgaden, where in the so-called *Strategisches Zimmer* (strategical room), the two played at world conquest. Rommel being able to contribute at that time enough technical knowledge to deal with any question of Hitler's. Both men were regarded by senior regular army officers as imitative boys who had to play with something military, if not with tin soldiers then with large maps. In a private memorandum to Hitler Rommel wrote: 'Our panzers will draw broad bloody gashes all over the map of the world like the knife of a surgeon. They will tear tracks of death despite all resistance.' Huge maps covered the walls of this room, and Hitler's personal A.D.C., Brueckner, was busy with large quantities of red ink marking the 'death tracks'. Hitler may have wondered where this was leading him, and few of his intimate friends were allowed to see the room, certainly not representatives of foreign countries or foreigners. He may have felt it wise to conceal his mind before potential victims; he certainly feared ridicule even more than Mussolini did, and violently hated those who showed it.

These intimate conferences gave Rommel courage to seek positions of greater influence. It was impossible for a lieutenant-colonel to apply for entrance to any regular general staff examination, but he could claim to have made special studies of modern armoured warfare, and he applied for employment in that branch. Given a test he failed miserably, and complained bitterly to his Führer, who consoled him with promises for the future.

Though at that time, in 1935, he did not win the recognition he sought, he gained valuable knowledge of other officers who had faced the examination board with him. He made a record of their qualifications, and jeeringly told them that the time would come when, in spite of the army bureaucracy, he would be their commander-in-chief, hinting that he would know how to use other influence—a reference, of course, to his intimacy with Hitler.

Under the rules and regulations of any army, Rommel's

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career should now have come to an end. He could not expect to reach high rank by normal channels, but instead he secured a position of considerable personal value to him, though of no military importance; he became a liaison officer between the regular army and the Hitler Youth. This was a useless step in the career of an officer as such, for the members of the Hitler Youth would automatically be drafted into the Reich's Labour Service, and from there into the army, leaving officers attached to the organisation at a dead end. Knowing the limitations of the appointment, Rommel, in his capacity as expert on German youth recruitment, attended conferences that were presided over by corps and group commanders. The elderly generals were fully aware that they had to deal with an out-and-out Party member, and though discounting his military aspirations they could not entirely ignore his considerable political influence. During this period he wrote a book called *Infantry Attacks* which was put on the official Army list of recommended training books. It is a compilation of material which the titular author was able to collect while he was teacher at the infantry school in Dresden.

He received the appointment of full colonel on Hitler's direct order, and was put in charge of the Führer's headquarters, where by this time the conviction prevailed that war might break out at any time. When Austria was occupied Rommel left his duties at headquarters to become commandant of the Austrian military school at Wiener Neustadt. Here he bore himself with the arrogance of a man who saw himself not only as the confidential adviser of Hitler but also his prospective right hand in future military operations on a large scale, and the rising generation of Austrian officers saw no reason to question his pretensions.

Throughout this period Rommel had had opportunity to make himself acquainted with an operational plan of the German High Command called '*Plan Süd*' (Plan South). This plan was a direct result of the closer military collaboration that followed the completion of the Axis alliance treaty between Italy and Germany, and it was the basis of German military assistance to Italian operations in North Africa. Its founder and early executant was the German General Tschmirer. Hitler had been aware of Rommel's interest in colonial expansion from the early days of

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the Epp-Haushofer school, and now urged that Rommel should be permitted to study the more concrete results of General Staff work in Berlin. His demand was so far effective that when von Brauchitsch went to Libya in 1937, Rommel was attached to his staff. The Italian Governor General of North Africa, Marshal Balbo, said on that occasion, 'The Nazis are now sending us even their future inspectors.' Von Brauchitsch returned disappointed about Italian military preparations. Rommel obtained special 'sick leave', and used it to see Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk, and Bardia, through which he travelled by car, having refused an aeroplane that was offered him by the Italian Army authorities. He went on to make a close inspection of defence works in Sicily and southern Italy, and after that he turned civilian and went as a tourist to Egypt, where people heard of Herr Rommel, a sick German, travelling all over the Suez Canal region and, again by motor car, in the direction of Cyrenaica.

Returning to Germany he had long conferences with Hitler, whom he convinced that General Tschmirer's preparations for the so-called German Desert Corps were unrealistic and inadequate. Tschmirer remained in command, but he had to adopt a good part of Rommel's plans, which resulted in the most elaborate preparations ever given to the special expeditionary force of any army. The Propaganda Ministry prepared opinion inside Germany by means of a great campaign for the recovery of the lost German colonies. General Ritter von Epp, who had been given the lucrative but not very influential position of Reichs Governor of Bavaria, became the chief of the Nazi Party colonial office. At first it seemed that this new propaganda campaign was started simply to give von Ribbentrop something to bargain with when negotiating with the Allied Governments, and especially with Great Britain.

The army, however, thought and acted with larger aims. Two special training centres and two training grounds were founded in Germany. Schleswig Holstein had one, Bavaria the other, and in both the barracks and training halls were adapted to tropical conditions. By a mixture of steam and heated air, the soldier, as far as was possible by artificial means, was acclimatised to tropical conditions. Special equipment down to the smallest detail was tried out again and again, and special diets were

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provided by the medical staff of the Hamburg Tropical Disease Institute, which also supplied the nucleus of the medical personnel attached to this 'Desert Corps', as it was known at that time. Soldiers undergoing the training had to subsist on a minimum of drinking water, and the selection boards had their hands full sifting out the candidates. Difficulties in the maintenance of health were immediately experienced. The soldiers, unused to an ersatz tropical climate, developed boils and skin trouble of a peculiar type, and experiments with vitamin pills and other medicaments led to special food lozenges.

Another test imposed was equally severe. To the wild sand dunes of eastern Pomerania near the little port of Leba, to East Prussia and to the long dunes guarding the Haff lakes, huge vans transported apparatus for the production of artificial dust and sand storms. Sand-proof casings for the engines and the interior of the tanks were gradually developed. The strength of this Corps amounted roughly to less than one division, that is, 10,000 officers and men.

This new branch of the army was not at first obvious enough in its importance to interest Rommel. He accompanied Hitler during the invasion of Czechoslovakia, in his old post at Hitler's headquarters, which in its travelling form had a remarkably comprehensive scheme of protection for which he was mainly responsible. He is credited with having had the idea of a dual general headquarters, that is, one that could be transported by rail in five trains with mounted anti-aircraft guns and armour plating, comprising a battalion for guard duties, a large train of wagons specially constructed for map tables, in addition to Hitler's own private wagons and guest cars for generals and foreign visitors. A less imposing expression of this design did, in fact, appear in the shape of flying general headquarters for which twelve huge Junkers troop-carriers were converted to provide the accommodation that would have been found in the train, with the difference that anti-aircraft and guard protection was unnecessary and effective protection was given by a strong fighter screen.

Rommel served in the same capacity in the campaign in Poland, and took care that the Führer did not endanger his precious life. Such care seems to have been necessary here owing to an unwonted recklessness on Hitler's part. As soon as he saw the con-



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centrated German armed forces making good progress, his curiosity for a time led him to discard his usually morbid anxiety for his personal safety and to hurry forward to get a good view of the process of that annihilation of the Polish nation which he had publicly decreed. Rommel's precautions, however, did not go unrewarded. He was appointed general in command of a Panzer division, which was later to play a conspicuous part in the defeat of France.

He had arrived. He left the insignificant post of Hitler's personal attendant to take command in the field, and later, with increasing responsibility, to experience a considerable run of luck. With rapid promotion to the highest rank, he felt compensated at last for the lack of staff training that had been denied him. It is no mere coincidence that Rommel commanded the leading Panzer division in the Army Group A in the west, the group that under the command of Field Marshal von Rundstedt broke through and finally outflanked the Maginot Line. Von Rundstedt's manoeuvre opened the way for vast and spectacular advances by mechanised formations, and Rommel, pushed forward by Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler, reaped a good deal of the credit, though he was only executing tactical measures under the direction of corps, army and group commanders. It was his 7th Panzer division which claimed for itself the nickname of 'phantom division' because of its speedy advance. Among its exploits was the capture in the market square of the little French town of St. Valery-en-Caux of eight generals and 25,000 men, the majority of whom belonged to the B.E.F. For Rommel this prize was no more than a stroke in the fortunes of war, for it was inevitable that numerous prisoners, and senior officers among them, would be taken once von Rundstedt's circumspect plan was successful.

Making the most of his personal prerogatives, Rommel commandeered a heavy 32-tonner tank for his own use and protection. The man in charge of the motorised infantry incorporated into his Panzer division was Georg von Bismarck, a descendant of the famous Chancellor and a well-known expert on the subject on which Rommel had claimed to be the leading specialist in the German Army. Aware that if it came to the test he would certainly not prove the expert he claimed to be, Rommel, making use of one of his signal gifts, proceeded to take von Bismarck's

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measure and estimate his true value. He enlisted his services for his own purposes. Von Bismarck was subsequently allowed to complete his knowledge under field conditions in the Russian campaign, but was earmarked for service under Rommel in North Africa. Meanwhile the campaign in France had brought Rommel the coveted decoration of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

With Italy's entry into the war the larger German plans for North Africa were brought into use. Marshal Graziani received his overwhelming defeat at the hands of General Wavell. The Italian performance in the war in the west had been inglorious. Their advance along the French Riviera was more a stage affair than a military operation, exposing nothing but Mussolini's mean spirit of revenge for mortification at the hands of a more powerful neighbour, and Graziani's defeat showed that the Italian war machine was unequal to a really severe test, though the Italian General Staff contained a limited number of officers who could, and can compete with any of their opposite numbers in the German or Allied armies.

These more competent Italian soldiers, however, had little chance then of putting their ideas into practice, and the hopeless position in which Italy found herself after the defeat of Graziani made the entrance of the German Desert Corps, which by 1941 had been re-named the Afrika Korps, all the more spectacular. General Tschmirer had been relieved of the command, and Rommel took over.

The preparations of the German General Staff for this expedition had been very thorough, as has been seen, and Rommel chose his generals with understanding of what he needed. With *carte blanche* given him by Hitler, he was able to select some of the best men in the German Army. General Ritter von Thoma, one of the few higher officers who had gained experience during the civil war in Spain, was fully capable of conducting operations in the entire North African sphere himself, but he had to serve as field commander of the Korps under Rommel's major direction. Supply Chief Cruewell was an expert in his job, Georg von Bismarck had proved himself under Rommel in France; and Generals Schmidt, von Ravensberg and Stumme had all won confidence in the German Army. With all this went an extremely

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strong air umbrella, later under the command of Field Marshal Kesselring, against which, at the outset, the R.A.F. could do little.

Rommel's attack and the British counter-attack in 1941 did not change the situation decisively. Then in 1942, with another expeditionary force and an almost completely independent command, he advanced up to El Alamein. The advance showed perfect staff work and first class collaboration between the various branches of his force.

When he had reached El Alamein Rommel was at the height of his career. He returned to Berlin, and in the presence of Hitler faced a huge audience in the Sports Palace, where the spontaneous enthusiasm with which he was received was noticeable beside the controlled greetings accorded to the Führer. In fact it seemed that Dr. Goebbels had slightly overdone the Rommel propaganda inside Germany. But it was all in the interest of the Nazi Party and of Hitler himself that a man renowned as a Nazi should be acclaimed before all Germany, so that the growing reputation of the other generals of the regular army should at least not gain in comparison.

On 3rd October 1942 Rommel said to a party of foreign journalists:

'To-day we stand 100 kilometres from Alexandria and hold the gateway of Egypt, with the full intention of getting there, too. We have not got so far with any intention of being flung back either sooner or later. You may rely on our holding fast to what we have got . . .' 'American material,' he added, 'is of no particular importance, although the new American tanks are much improved weapons.'

It is curious to learn that this former storm trooper thug, who had shown no compunction in participating in the brutalities of Hitler's gang, complained in the same interview about the 'Maoris, head-hunters and such troops in the Eighth Army', and of their 'unfair fighting methods'. Possibly Rommel had a glimpse of the shape of things to come, and thought that as a Field Marshal a tone of discrimination would be becoming, and perhaps provide him with a loop-hole through which to escape indictment?

In his advance towards the El Alamein position it became ob-

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vious to Rommel that his Italian allies were neither accustomed to the pace set then nor willing to accept the century-old slogan: 'Travaillez pour le roi de Prusse', which was painfully enforced on them in this campaign. It was the unfailing irony of fate that the man who had dismissed Italian military claims as nonsense, and who had been convinced in the last war that the Italian was never a match for any decent soldier of any nation, was now impelled to issue a special secret order endorsed: '*To Officers Only*'. This order read:

'The Germans have always been good soldiers, therefore they must not boast. Still less must they belittle the achievements of the soldiers of other countries.

'The Italian, of course, is not quite the same as the German soldier, the former having his own peculiarities. He is a different human being. Therefore it would be wrong to judge him by German standards.

'He fights as well as he can—that must be appreciated. It is unworthy to laugh at our ally, and to talk about his softness. We must try to see his good points.'

Though this secret order was apparently issued as some sort of protection for the Italians, it had an entirely different meaning a few weeks later when Rommel showed, even in action, what he really thought of his allies, and how much he despised them. He had the average German feeling towards the Italians, who are considered by the German to be as much 'non-Aryan' as the Jew, the Arab, the Japanese, and everybody else who has not the complexion of the schoolgirl and the hair of the blonde beast. The Germans do not always approach this ideal themselves, but their spokesmen excuse their less 'nordic' compatriots as being of the inevitable mixture that resulted from the thousand-year-old migration of tribes through central Europe. To the nations that are not so fortunate as to be even of this mixture they are quick to add the stigma of 'filthy, lazy, mentally degenerate Southerner', a propagandist projection that has now become fixed in the mind of the Nazi-schooled German.

Meanwhile Rommel, always avid for publicity, and certain of the backing of the past-master in that art in Berlin, Dr. Goebbels, neglected no means of increasing his popularity in Germany. By this time a rumour had spread through the German and Italian

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rank and file in Africa that Rommel was by no means the grand master of strategy he claimed to be. On various occasions, when decisions of great significance had to be taken, he was neither at his headquarters nor could he be reached by his staff. He had simply disappeared in the desert to inspect units on the march, and possibly to take the salute of the troops he visited—a ceremony of which he always liked to be the centre, conscious, no doubt, when his troops goose-stepped past him, even in the middle of the desert, that he was the German general most in the public eye. These distrustful murmurings became so persistent that one of the younger officers in his immediate entourage broadcast on the Berlin radio an account of Rommel's personal activities that was intended to dispose of criticism and at the same time to give some explanation of the conspicuous absence of the Commander-in-Chief at certain grave moments, absences which by that time could no longer be denied. Lieutenant Berndt gave this account.

'We of the Afrika Korps call him the General of the High Road. He is in the desert literally from dawn until late at night. He does not direct operations from a desk in headquarters—that is what he has his staff officers for—but he is always seeing for himself, experiencing things himself, and personally influencing his troops. A few radio communications, an improvised wire, connects him with his headquarters. He is also a wizard at map reading. Rommel's ability to change his decisions at a moment's notice whenever the enemy gives him a chance is what characterises him most. There are times when he drives his commanders to exasperation by changing his decisions. Once he actually changed his mind ten or eleven times, and countermanded a previous order during a single battle.'

A corroboration of this broadcast impression came from Cairo, when Lieutenant Otto von Tiedemann, a war correspondent captured by the Eighth Army, spoke of his experiences whilst he was attached to Rommel's headquarters for four weeks.

In Lieutenant Berndt's broadcast, though it had a different purpose, we can divine the real Rommel. There is truth in what Berndt said, but the freedom of movement exercised by Rommel, is appropriate to a divisional Panzer commander, not to the Commander-in-Chief of an entire theatre of operations

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who, by the nature of his appointment, has to be chief of the High Command, Chief of the General Staff, and Army Group Commander in one person. These mercurial characteristics of the general had their merit, and there was great value in them when exercised in their appropriate place; for instance, when he was called upon to fight only armoured battles in the centre of Cyrenaica, where they won him a great victory.

But in the course of that battle in North Africa, the Commander-in-Chief of the Axis expeditionary force was never called upon to give decisions that went beyond the tactical issue of the moment. As soon as it was over, and he had to decide the broader issues of strategy, he exposed his limitations. He still saw only the immediate gain, which was Tobruk. He had another success, it is true, but it was a tactical one. He won the port of Tobruk, and lost the strategic victory that might have been won by the immediate pursuit of the retreating Eighth Army.

Immediately before the battle of El Alamein he failed again to grasp the larger issue. His attempt to pierce our defences and to outflank us from the south were not the operations of a first class general. Every diversionary trick played against him by Generals Alexander and Montgomery succeeded. Dummy tank battalions or faked movements of bodies of troops were always taken by Rommel for the real thing.

Once checked in his advance, he prepared four positions in which he might repel the opening attack. His plan of defence was too simple in conception. Massing Panzer divisions at the northern and southern ends of his position, and leaving a weak infantry nucleus (inevitably Italian) in the centre, he intended to draw us on to his weak position, and then to close on us from the north and the south with his armoured forces. That this scheme did not work out was not surprising, considering the qualities of the Allied generals who opposed him, and it makes understandable the criticism voiced against him by his second-in-command, General Ritter von Thoma, who, like other Afrika Korps generals, saw that Rommel was more concerned with trying to steal his thunder than with planning circumspect military operations. It is not enough to have the qualifications of a professor of tactics at a military college, or to have in one's grasp all the personal strings at the Führer's Chancellery,

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or to cruise the desert in a private car and enjoy the camp life; the place of the Commander-in-Chief is at his headquarters, where he can control developments from minute to minute, and not in the first or second line of battle, where he can only deal with tactical details.

General Dan Pienaar, the Commander of the South African Springboks in the Middle East theatre, once said of Rommel, 'I don't consider him clever or cunning, but he is determined and tenacious'. When Rommel suffered his reverse at Alamein this opinion was shown to be well-founded. With brutal ruthlessness scarcely equalled even in German military history, he left behind the majority of the Italian infantry, without transport, without water, without medical supplies, hopelessly abandoned in the scorching desert under a blazing sun. These allies of his became mere cattle in the face of the imperative need to save his German troops, conduct which ill became his knighthood of the Order *Pour le Mérite*. Possibly he had calculated that the 'soft' British generals would allow themselves to be diverted to the south to capture these Italians. It must have been a surprise to him to find that his opposite numbers understood the situation only too well, and felt quite confident of bagging the Italian division in the south, or what was left of them, in their own time.

Rommel then started on his two thousand miles retreat into Tunisia, and here even the most trustworthy military critics have exaggerated the military skill he was called upon to exercise. An examination of the retreat down to the smallest tactical detail forces one to the conclusion that Rommel did nothing whatever, and that the pauses which occurred were deliberately chosen by Generals Alexander and Montgomery for the sake of their supply systems. The ideal natural positions at El Agheila and at the salt lakes of Misurata, the considerable artificial defences at Tripoli proper—all these were opportunities that Rommel missed, only to continue his flight whenever General Montgomery's dispositions indicated business.

The fighting in the Mareth Line proper has been wrongly interpreted for some time. The official report of the Italian Marshal Messe, who commanded the 1st Italian Army at Alamein, and who was again in command of a considerable force of Italians at Mareth, throws some light on Rommel's grasp of the situation.

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Messe complains that when he had repulsed the first frontal attack by the Eighth Army he was in an admirable position to meet any further attacks, and he protested to Rommel as Commander-in-Chief against orders that he should withdraw immediately. And naturally Messe also complains that when once this order was given none of the motor transport was ready to get the troops out. It had long before been taken by the Germans themselves. What Marshal Messe probably did not see is the fact that with all his vaunted genius Rommel could not make up his mind, and that he fell back on the practice of coming to a decision hour by hour which he had applied so successfully during tactical tank battles at Bir Hacheim, 'Knightsbridge' and Sidi Rezegh. But in this case it resulted in an up-and-down movement of his armour between the Maknassy-El Guettar sectors and the eastern part of the Mareth Line.

Here was Rommel's opportunity to show whether he was the man that Dr. Goebbels in Berlin had claimed him to be. One who knew him personally, who knew his capacity for bluff and his pose as a master of strategy to be a pretence, in spite of his brilliant tactical knowledge, realised that he was bound to fail. His Italian allies could be certain only of one thing: that they would be left behind as an addition to the minefields that were sown in the path of the Allied advance.

This must have had the very worst effect on the Italian people, who already resented the arrogance of the German Luftwaffe and Gestapo and S.S. officers as well as the German regular army officers who were gradually commandeering the whole of Italy as a base. Italy was always recognised as the weakest link in the Axis structure, and Rommel's treatment of the Italians during his African campaign, and his frequent expressions of disgust, despite his secret orders to his officers, must have done much to weaken that link further.

For in Rommel the Italians had to deal with a man who was suffering continuously from an inflamed sense of inferiority, based on the knowledge, of which in early days he had been so often reminded, that he did not belong to the army caste and that he could imitate it only in arrogance and cock-sureness. In spite of the rank and power that had been given him by another man whose character was even more acutely warped by an inferi-



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ority complex, Rommel still smarted under Field Marshal von Rundstedt's reference to him as 'that clown who commands the Adolf Hitler circus' (Hitler's travelling G.H.Q.).

Before an audience mainly composed of German Army officers and rank and file he had a modicum of discretion and consideration, but the Italian atmosphere proved too much for him and stimulated him to show the Prussian character at its worst. Perhaps nothing leaves a truer picture of the man than his conduct during a visit to a captured British field hospital, where German and British doctors were working together in tending the wounds of British and German soldiers. It is understood that on such occasions each commander-in-chief should not only address his own chief medical officers but never omit to have a word or two with the enemy's. Rommel made a point of ignoring the British M.O.s completely, expecting thereby to impress the Italian officers on his staff. Later history will show that the effect was the opposite of what he had intended it to be.

## Field Marshal Erhard Milch

*In the ordinary business of life, industry can do anything which genius can do, and very many things which it cannot.*

H. W. BEECHER, PROVERBS FROM PLYMOUTH PULPIT, 1870.

Field Marshal Erhard Milch was born on 30th March 1892 in Wilhelmshaven. His father, the owner of a retail chemist business, became Quarter-Master General for Medical Stores during the last war. Milch senior thus had a general's rank, though within the German Army his position was of less consequence than that of the Accountant General, who used to rank lowest inside the German War Office.

Having passed his matriculation in 1910 the future Field Marshal became an ensign in the 1st Heavy Artillery Regiment at Königsberg in East Prussia, and in August 1911 he was made a lieutenant in that regiment, the rank he still held at the outbreak of the war. Milch had chosen a heavy artillery regiment because he was keenly interested in technical problems, which he could master better in such a formation than anywhere else. But that did not satisfy his mind, and in 1915 he successfully applied for a transfer to the Imperial German Air Force. Here again the technical side, such as navigation and observation, interested him more than the spectacular duties of the fighter squadrons that were then gaining their first laurels. He became a reconnaissance flyer, mainly occupied in directing and supervising artillery fire. Promoted first lieutenant, he became chief of the reconnaissance formations 5 and 204 and later of the pursuit group No. 6. He then secured one of the rarest appointments inside the German Imperial Army Air Force, that of Air General Staff Officer attached to higher staffs as air specialist. This appointment brought him the rank of captain in 1918.

By that time Milch was known as a circumspect and careful planner and an industrious, capable and ambitious young officer; and it was these qualities that led to his quick promotion at an early age. Malicious tongues have claimed that young Milch, not greatly attracted to the more dangerous duties of active flying had, to get this appointment, used all his father's influence and pulled the correct string in the appropriate quarter. 'The

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apothecary's flying son' he was nick-named by some of his fellow officers, especially by those who had been seconded from the cavalry. It is established, however, that the same officers were greatly impressed by the organising abilities of the twenty-six year old captain.

After the Armistice thousands of German pilots had no opportunity of carrying on their profession, not even within the restrictions that were imposed on the infantry, cavalry or artillery officer, for officially the German Flying Corps was to be disbanded. Milch, however, managed to become commanding officer of a flying organisation attached to the semi-legal 'Grenzschutz' (Border Defence Corps), a predecessor of the Reichswehr. In the special art of camouflage then being pursued by generals and general staff officers commanding the ground forces of the semi-official corps, the art of disguising from Allied inspectors the actual strength of a corps, young Milch was worthy of his teachers.

When the existence of this post-war flying corps came to an end Milch sought an opening with the civil air organisations that were then springing up like mushrooms. He first studied economics at the University of Königsberg and at the technical high school of Danzig, and his perhaps innate grasp of commercial essentials was thus developed into a wide knowledge that was to be invaluable to him in his future career.

He then joined a private commercial company, the Lloyd-Ostflug, the first civil air company in eastern Germany, and became a chief organiser for the Danzig air mail service. By the end of 1920, when many of his former brother officers were unemployed and, like Göring, were trying their luck as commanding officers of smaller or larger illegal armed formations, the 28-year-old Milch was managing director of the 'Danziger Luftpost'. In 1923 he became a technical director of the Junkers Air Traffic Company, at that time the most important air transport firm in Germany. The Junkers works were compelled to run their own air transport company because they had little chance of finding buyers for the aircraft produced in their own factory. Milch was President of the Commission that merged a number of smaller German air transport companies with the Junkers Company, which appeared in 1926 as the well-known Lufthansa Limited, and was later to become Germany's foremost air transport concern.

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Grave allegations were made about this time against Milch as managing director of the new air trust. He was accused of having had, in some manner not specified, financial transactions involving the consolidation of shares of the smaller companies, and of making a considerable profit for himself. Less precise, but equally grave in their implications, were charges that Milch accepted commissions from certain aircraft factories, in return for which, it was understood, he would close his eyes to the security measures that were necessary for aircraft transporting passengers. None of these charges was brought to court, but it is significant of their serious origin that such an important newspaper as the democratic *Berliner Tageblatt* identified itself with the accusers.

During the years 1924-26 Milch was a kind of commercial ambassador travelling to South America and the United States to study air lines there and to try to secure interests for German air companies, and by 1927-28 he could claim that the German air lines had outgrown their infancy. The Junkers at Dessau were producing air liners that were both reliable and economical in their upkeep, heavy machines that could carry a considerable amount of freight or passengers.

The Reichswehr was faced with a problem of its own. Though illegal rearmament of ground forces had been going on steadily for some time, no secret activity in air rearmament had been found possible. Any commitments in this direction would have been too conspicuous to be concealed under any cloak. It was necessary to look for something entirely outside the actual organisation of the Reichswehr Ministry, and in the eyes of the schemers Milch and the Lufthansa had qualified themselves for such a task. It might have been noticed then that a great part of the Army and Navy budget of the Republican Reichswehr was designated as 'transferable'. The meaning of this term never became completely clear to the average German, and even foreign powers and their observers whose business it was to recognise the direction of German Government expenditure, did not see, or did not choose to see, through this financial blind of the Accountant Department of the Reichswehr Ministry. 'Transferable' meant nothing less than that, though the Watch Committee of Parliament might allot millions for specified branches of the armed ground forces,

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the officers responsible were quite at liberty to use part of these funds for a purpose not specified.

Here Milch's adroitness found an opening again. As he himself has said, he could 'with the application of a spanner transform Junkers aircraft engaged on civil duties into bombers almost overnight'. Such a process, of course, was not as simple as all that, and production on a large scale needed money, so much money, in fact, that no private company could have undertaken the task. The Reichswehr stepped in with its 'transferable' funds. Quite apart from this illegal movement of money, certain civilian departments of the German Government were willing to assist the Lufthansa, though not with the same purpose as that of the Reichswehr, and probably without the full knowledge of it.

Milch knew how to use in air armament all the money he could lay his hands on. He did not dabble in politics as did many of his former brother officers. Content to be regarded by the Reichswehr as a reliable nationalist, he nevertheless took care not to emphasise that reputation, for he had a great competitor in Dr. Hugo Eckener, who was extensively financed by the civilian departments of the German Government. Dr. Eckener, who constructed Zeppelins, was a Democrat and also had great popular support, and although Milch was all for the German people being made air-minded, as he called it, he was scornful of the many millions sunk in Eckener's enterprise, which he considered useless for any future military purpose. The Reichswehr agreed with him, and, therefore, if he was not to be defeated in competition with this favourite of the Government, he had to adopt at least a rather colourless political position. This did not prevent him from secretly having the closest contact with Hermann Göring, distinguished as an airman in the last war and one of Hitler's chief lieutenants in the internal political struggle for power.

Göring regarded himself as the champion of anything connected with air organisation in the Nazi Party, but, as always, he also knew his own limitations. He knew, for example, that he could not command a fraction of the organising talent possessed by the ambitious, industrious and intelligent young Milch. He had noticed, too, that this young man had little political ambition, and was probably the best office-boy for the Nazis that could be

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found. Therefore, when Göring managed to obtain an appointment as Reichs Commissar for Air on the occasion of the forming of the first National Socialist Cabinet in January 1933, he was quick to appoint the managing director of the Lufthansa, Milch, to be Secretary of State under his command.

The Treaty of Versailles, though continuously broken by Germany in secret, had not yet been repudiated, and if Hitler had then openly flouted one of its most important clauses under which any German air force was prohibited, foreign governments and peoples would have been less easily deceived by his profession of 'peaceful intentions'. Göring and Milch therefore devised a scheme by which they hoped gradually to accustom foreign nations to the idea that Germany was developing an air force of her own. This policy of little by little succeeded, for the few who foresaw its consequences were unheeded. The N.S.F.K., the National Socialist Flying Corps, seemed an innocent beginning, and as an enlarged flying club of the Nazi Party it caused no alarm. Yet here was the embryo of the Luftwaffe. The N.S.F.K. sent its flying aces to international air races, where they took part in balloon competitions, and it was busy in many other fields throwing sand in the eyes of foreign governments. Financial aid from the German Government was on a lavish scale. The departments of the Reichswehr which had collaborated with Milch during the years before Hitler came into power were now busier than ever in preparing for the air force to come.

When Hitler declared the rearmament of the Reich to the world, and announced the creation of a German Luftwaffe, Milch, by now a colonel, was again Secretary of State under Reichs Minister Göring. Conscious of the necessity of somehow justifying the breaches of the Versailles Treaty, Göring and Milch, some years before the official appearance of the Luftwaffe, had started a campaign that was at once to create a sense of wrong inside Germany and to arouse sympathy outside. It was propaganda that succeeded completely at home (and too well abroad). Hence the formula of the 'shameful Treaty of Versailles', the attempt to recover national pride by reference to 'hopelessly outnumbered German armed forces', the effrontery of the assertion that Germany did not possess a single aeroplane for military purposes before 1935. All this prepared popular ground, both

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at home and abroad, for the sudden appearance in 1935 of an enormous Air Ministry and a huge staff for the Luftwaffe. Göring took a great deal of the credit for this organisation, but it was Milch who had laid the foundation years before. No one inside or outside Germany believed that such a huge administration, which was to be the brains of the expansion and direction of the Luftwaffe, could have been built up within two years.

It is well to remember that on 31st January 1933 Göring had become Commissar for Air; on 5th May 1933 the Air Ministry was formed, and on 1st March 1935 the Luftwaffe announced its existence officially.

Milch was now more careful than ever to keep away from political questions and discussions. Only on one occasion did he depart from his self-imposed rule, and that was when he was called on to save the life of a close friend and brilliant airman, Ernst Udet. Udet was the victor of 62 air combats in the last war, Knight of the *Pour le Mérite*, ace stunt flyer during the post-war period, organiser of air expeditions to Africa and the Arctic, in short a brilliant and daring airman in contrast to the discreet and business-minded Milch, who certainly did not underrate him. Since 1933 he had been the Quarter-Master General designate, whose department was officially announced only on 1st March 1935, and being an adventurer was not quite satisfied with his inconspicuous work. As a sideline he had taken over an air squadron belonging to the storm-trooper organisation. It has never been discovered whether he was so close a friend of Roehm's that he was willing to take part in any of that leader's more deeply laid schemes, but it is known that he was at the top of the list of those who were to be executed during the June purge of 1934.

Udet was not friendly with the Reichswehr hierarchy, for he had been frequently cold-shouldered in the post-war years by the conservative army caste to whom distinction in the new arm was not enough. Between Göring and Udet there was, in addition, a special personal animosity which had its origin in the days when Göring succeeded to the command of the famous Richthofen Squadron. Though Udet gave Göring credit as a brave pilot, and did not grudge him the appointment, he criticised him as being an unskilled fighter who was more courageous than clever. Göring's vanity could not stand such criticism, and he never hid

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his resentment. In spite of all this, Milch not only saved his friend from the firing squad but procured his appointment as Quarter-Master General in 1935.

In spite of his care never to take part in politics this was sufficient to make Himmler and Goebbels his watchful enemies. A sustained attack upon him by rumour followed, but he retained his post in the Air Ministry through the support of his Minister, Göring, who knew very well that he could never build up, expand and command such a vast organisation as the Luftwaffe was intended to become without the assistance of a master of big business like Milch.

Milch's ancestry has been frequently under discussion, for his position among anti-Semite Nazis gives it singular meaning. At one time he was identified with a family of the same name who before 1914 owned a large artificial manure factory in the province of Posen. That link-up could not be established, but then it was asserted that his mother was a Jewess. Higher Gestapo circles spread the story that Milch's mother had stated under oath that Milch was not a child of her marriage to the former Quarter-Master General in command of medical stores for the Imperial German Army. What is true is that Milch was called upon to sign a declaration upon his word of honour that he knew of no non-Aryan blood, and this he did. It is equally important that further inquiries into his family tree were categorically forbidden by Göring himself.

Milch, who rose quickly to the rank of general, became better known abroad during many visits which he paid to this country and to Italy and France.

With the conclusion of the anti-Comintern Axis pact he was, as Secretary of State of the Luftwaffe, faced with two problems. One was to examine the strategic value of the Italian Regia Aeronautica, the second to satisfy the demands of the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force, which was far behind in the training of its personnel, and, in 1937, certainly not up-to-date in its material. Frequent visits to Rome convinced Milch that the Italian Air Force, which had gained some reputation by its spectacular mass Atlantic crossings under Marshal Balbo, had since then entered a period of stagnation, and was now of little practical use. In October 1936 Milch visited the airport of Mirafiore, near Turin,



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took the salute at a parade of the 4th Air Brigade at Lorate Pozzolo, near Milan, and inspected the aeroplane factory at Sesto Calende. What he saw was not encouraging. The Italians lagged behind in design and material, and though a great number of pilots were trained and enlisted in the reserve formations, he was not at all convinced of their fighting value. Memoranda bearing Milch's signature, however, had no influence upon the final political outcome.

Again in May 1939 he conferred in Rome with General Valle, the Italian Under-Secretary for Air, and though the official report describes the meeting as one that was 'to draw up terms for reciprocal collaboration between the Italian and German Air Forces and the intensification of collaboration in the military field', Milch was really there to reprimand the Italians for lagging behind in the programme agreed on two years before. The Italians excused themselves with the plea that though they had sufficient pilots the production of machines had declined because they needed special steels for which they could not pay. They also claimed that the Spanish Civil War had swallowed up too many machines. The official communique hid the fact that Milch was required to make the best of a bad job.

The problem of Japan, the Far Eastern Axis partner, was different. General Tomoyuki Yamashita commanded the Japanese Army Air Force. The German Air Attaché at the German Embassy in Tokio, von Gronau, had sent home a steady flow of complaints which finished with the conclusion that the Japanese had no effective air force worth mentioning. Of dive-bombing they knew nothing.

Milch sent his best friend, Udet, to Japan to go thoroughly into Japanese flying resources, and on receiving the report he sent out a German Air Mission to organise Japan's Air Force and drill her pilots. Capable of facing anything and learning anything, then as now, the Japanese had not shown any innate genius for flying. Milch relied upon von Gronau, air attaché in Tokio, to smooth out any difficulties and prevent friction, but German diplomacy was not enough to offset German methods and manners. The work of the German Air Mission nearly brought about a break in the cordial relations between Japan and Germany. On arrival the German Luftwaffe officers put the Japanese through the most

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vigorous training, marked by very little understanding of the men placed at their disposal; they were compelled to dive-bombing with inadequate training, with the result that the death rate of Japanese personnel under training by the Germans was higher than that suffered by Japan in her air operations in China. Public opinion, and even higher army officers, became resentful and the Germans were compelled to modify their methods. In the end Milch could report to Göring that satisfactory progress had been made. The war, which the Germans and Japanese already had in mind, was to prove it.

The Japanese surprise air attacks on Pearl Harbour, the dive-bombing in Malaya, the destruction of the British battleships off Singapore, were executed by pilots who had received their training indirectly from Milch through his Air Mission to Japan. Japan commanded a small but very skilled group of pilots who made the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour more deadly by their all-out air onslaught. These pilots formed the élite of the Japanese officers corps, they had had the best training available in the Axis countries, and they were intended and expected to tip the scale decisively against the United States during the first few weeks. But this quality was rare among Japanese air personnel as a whole, and the inferior capacity of the majority is among the causes of the surprising failure of the Japanese to exploit their initial successes to the utmost. That failure was entirely the affair of Japan; none of the responsibility for it rested on Milch and Gronau.

The growing confidence inside the German High Command was greatly strengthened by memoranda Milch was able to supply on the weakness of the effective French Air Force. He managed to get on rather cordial terms with the French Chief of the Air Staff, General Joseph Vuillemin, and personally visited the French air establishment, where nothing was hidden from his experienced eye. He saw that, from the first day of any operation against France, the Luftwaffe could play cat and mouse with the French Air Force.

His valuation of the Royal Air Force was not quite so reassuring for the Secretary of State of the Luftwaffe. Milch had seen an air display in 1936 at Hatfield, and was duly impressed by it. Next year, October 1937 Milch headed a deputation of the Luftwaffe which comprised his friend Udet, by that time Quarter-

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master General of the Luftwaffe, Lieut.-General Stumpf, Lieut.-Colonel Polte, Major Nielsen and Major Kreipe.

Returning to Berlin from that visit, Major Kreipe, who was the personal A.D.C. to Milch, related to friends over a glass of beer at the exclusive Aero Club the impressions his chief had gained during the visit. Though the R.A.F. display at Hendon was duly appreciated, a stronger impression was made by visits to aircraft factories at Birmingham and Coventry. According to Kreipe, Milch was not disposed to dismiss the potential strength of the R.A.F. in the same way as he did the French Air Force, and though he was confident that the immediate striking force of the R.A.F. would not be relatively high for the next two or three years, he warned his Government against under-estimation if production of aircraft and training of new crews were brought up to a real war footing.

This belief led later on to the Battle of Britain, and the bombing of England in 1940-41. For Milch saw the only remedy against the efficiency of the R.A.F. in what is known in German army circles as a 'suffocation attack'. This implied that if the R.A.F. were able to take to the air in full strength with expanded personnel and reinforced aircraft, the Luftwaffe would stand a doubtful chance of winning a decisive victory. Therefore such a development had to be prevented by 'suffocating' the R.A.F., which meant a prolonged bombardment of the districts of production before their factories could turn out the planes. Milch's visit to this country in 1937, combined with the reports of the German Air Attaché in London, General Wenninger, laid the fundamental basis for the German onslaught after the fall of France.

The outbreak of the war saw a great deal of Luftwaffe work in the Polish campaign, but ground operations dominated. The only innovation of Milch's during air operations against Poland was the attachment of members of the German minority in Poland to commanding officers of air squadrons, who were used as pathfinders for targets. The Polish Air Force was not up-to-date in material, but when the full story of Poland's part in this war is written it will become clear that every Polish pilot could have claimed a much higher standard of morale than any Luftwaffe officer, whose chief source of confidence was that he was a member of a force which hopelessly outnumbered that of the Poles.

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The attack on Denmark and Norway was executed according to plans with which neither Milch nor any other Luftwaffe officer had anything to do. These plans were originally laid down in 1925-26, and had been drawn up by officers of the German Navy. In 1940 the basis of them still stood, though their tactical execution was facilitated by the Luftwaffe's enormous resources in transport planes. The long peace-time preparation which Milch had directed as managing director of the Lufthansa now had its effect. The Ju.52, to which the Norwegian campaign owed its success, was originally a commercial plane for cargo and passengers. Milch, although only the technical executant, took full credit for success in the north, and there was nobody to oppose him, certainly not German naval officers who had been working on the original Norwegian plans in 1924. The German Navy's part in the Norwegian campaign is well known. Their losses were heavy, not only when they encountered the Norwegian land defences, but also from the Norwegian navy. The Germans no doubt anticipated losses from the British fleet, but the Norwegian forces actually caused most of the sinkings.

In the campaign in the west, which also went according to plan, Milch's role was not a conspicuous one. By the nature of the fighting the Luftwaffe was given no independence whatsoever, but had to act under strict orders from the army. Nevertheless the rank of Field Marshal was given him, a promotion somewhat discounted by its award to two important Luftwaffe generals, Sperrle and Kesselring, at the same time, though their previous rank was superior to that of Milch. That was an irritation, but there was to be a more serious check than this on the high reputation that Milch had been able to build up after Norway. There was an adverse influence in which could be seen, though obscurely, the hand of Hitler, who, as with Mussolini and other dictators, always jealously watched the rise of men under his command, playing one off against the other when a check seemed expedient. Hitler was fully aware that Göring was little more than a puppet in the larger organisation of the air force, and that the brain behind it was Milch's. He knew that to keep that organisation effective he needed Milch. But there is a difference between making use of a man and allowing him to become a popular hero. This jealousy has inspired Hitler whenever he has intervened in any

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branch of the German armed forces. Milch experienced it after the fall of France.

It seemed to the Secretary of State of the German Luftwaffe that the campaign against England that followed the fall of France had to be conducted—at least as far as fundamental rules of strategy went—on similar lines to that against Norway, with one important difference. Against Britain he could not depend at all on the German Navy, which had no desire to commit suicide in an engagement with the British Navy. The full weight of operations, therefore, fell on the shoulders of the Luftwaffe, which was fighting on lines that were actually extremely simple. How it tried to win that battle has been described in the official Government publication *The Battle of Britain*.

If Milch was charged with any of the responsibility for the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain he had a sound reply. Hitler had demanded numbers, and Milch had found ways of supplying them swiftly, ingeniously, and, in the beginning, secretly. He could hardly be blamed if the German machines lacked manoeuvrability, armament, speed and fire-power. The speed demanded in the supply of machines prevented that deliberation in the search for the best which produced the Spitfire. The best fighter in the world was designed with awareness of what the Stuka (Junkers 87) and the Messerschmitt lacked. The mass aircraft with which Milch had supplied Germany served her well in her first simple and brutal operations. Surprised and almost defenceless victims had been terrorised and subdued. Where there was little or no air force, Germany's had been irresistible, and before the all-out attack on Great Britain the Luftwaffe had never known an air battle on anything approaching equal terms.

In the Battle of Britain, which was the necessary preliminary to invasion, Hitler and Göring, above Milch, calculated on the effect of numbers, but the Luftwaffe failed, in spite of overwhelming numbers—roughly about two to one—because the nerves of Germany's leaders failed before the daily mounting total of losses. They were even doubtful, perhaps, whether their opponents could really be so much weaker numerically. And Germany's losses were so heavy because her pilots were, so to speak, beaten on the draw by airmen whose spirit could never be surpassed by the fanatical fighting qualities, brought to fever

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pitch under the eyes of the Gestapo, of the German pilots; above all, because they were outflown, outmanoeuvred and outgunned by the British machines, whose surpassing qualities Milch and his designers had not conceived, and had not been given the time to develop. The Battle of Britain, it should be remembered, lasted longer than any of the previous campaigns in which the Luftwaffe had fought as an independent unit. In Poland, the Low Countries and France it assisted the army in its ground operations and was completely under the command of the army.

It is too early yet to say that the strategical failure of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain determined Hitler to turn against Russia; probably political considerations had a much greater influence on him. It is beyond doubt, however, that the Luftwaffe's failure to achieve what was assigned to it had its effect in the sudden direction of the German war effort towards the east. It would have been easy for the supreme commander and Führer of the German people to get rid of the Secretary of State for Air after the failure against Britain, had not the possible scapegoat foreseen danger.

Whilst Goebbels was trumpeting ceaseless victories over the British Isles, Milch was careful to put two conspicuous leaders of the Luftwaffe into the limelight, keeping well behind the scenes himself. These leaders were Kesselring and Hugo Sperrle. Both officers had been active members of the Reichswehr, from which they had been transferred to the young Luftwaffe. Particularly on Field Marshal Sperrle, who was under his operational command, did the cunning Milch manage to lay the blame.

Since 1926 Sperrle, as a major in the Reichswehr Ministry, had been experimenting with the subject of stopping combustion engines by 'death rays'. Many other people had the same idea, but generally their experiments cost a lot of money and resulted in scientific humbug, after which the inventor usually went bankrupt if he did not come into conflict with the law. Major Sperrle achieved practical results. He constructed a machine from which electro-magnetic rays were emitted that stopped combustion engines at a distance of 20 yards, though beyond that range the rays were ineffective. This sideline of his studies had long been forgotten, but Milch took the opportunity of spreading the belief

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that Sperrle had once had a hand in experiments which in themselves had been discredited on scientific grounds, while their authors had been associated with fraud.

History recalls that as Milch managed to shift the responsibility to these people, who included the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, the powerful Göring himself, he was allowed to keep his post and his friends theirs.

The Russian campaign meant an abrupt end to the careers of many generals of the German Army; some came back to desk work, some were permanently axed. For generals of the Luftwaffe this was not the case for good reason. Opinion on the German General Staff in regard to the strength of the Russian ground forces was divided. The more technically instructed officers of the German Army had a high respect for the Russian armed forces while the less technical officers thought in conservative terms and held on to the conviction that their wide grasp of the art of war would be the decisive factor. This conservative section of the German Army was naturally unable also to estimate a factor that was of the most intangible character, and one they had never seen tested, namely the ability of the Russian General Staff to direct a national war of defence.

As far as air war was concerned the question was a much simpler one. From the beginning Milch stood on solid ground here. There was no doubt about what could be expected from the Red Air Force. The air arm in Russia was first class, the pilots were of the highest standard, the material had been tested in peace-time and proved to be of the best. The numerical strength was enormous, and the greater part of the industry producing war planes was out of the bombing range of any German aircraft. Throughout the Russian campaign there has never been the necessity for Milch to revert to the excuse 'I told you so', which became familiar among certain German army leaders. Decision in the east was from the beginning to be sought by the Germans on the ground by quick destruction of the Russian field armies. The Luftwaffe was expected to play an important part in it, but not a decisive one. While the army claimed victory after victory early in 1941, the Luftwaffe could not let its pretensions go by default, and more than once it was claimed that the entire Red Air Force had been destroyed. It is not known who was responsible for these

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announcements, but it certainly cannot have been Milch, for they were errors that were quickly exposed, and that called for scapegoats. These, Hitler did not fail to find. And Milch still kept his office.

The part which the Luftwaffe played in North Africa was not a glorious one. The Germans were effective enough as long as they outnumbered the British, but as soon as a certain parity was established British superiority in material and fighting skill became very conspicuous. Here Field Marshal Kesselring, being in the field, took the direct responsibility. Anybody aware of the secret animosity between Milch and Kesselring can guess at the personal satisfaction with which Milch saw the former Reichswehr officer under a cloud. Kesselring had never spared the diplomat Milch his rough manners, and it was Kesselring who started Milch's nickname of 'baby face', which suggests only too well the appearance of the plump, blue-eyed Under-Secretary of State for Air.

Though there has been a marked decrease in the responsibilities and activities of Milch as the brains of the Luftwaffe, he is bound to have thrown on him an important part in the defensive tasks that now confront German air power. He has shown that he is able to execute operations of limited offensive character. He has also shown where his limits lie. The decrease of German land power caused by the fighting in the east does not leave an unlimited reserve for the defence of the 15,000 mile coast of the fortress of Europe. The commanders charged with defending that fortress must call immediately upon the Luftwaffe. The combination of army and air force worked well in France, but the opponents during that campaign, in which the Luftwaffe, independently trained and organised, was under the absolute control of the army, cannot be compared in any respect with what the German armed forces have to face. And it is useful to know the qualifications and the weaknesses of the man who has been at the centre of Hitler's air force since its stealthy creation.



## **Field Marshal Walther Heinrich Alfred Herman von Brauchitsch**

*"I organise before I fight"* VON BRAUCHITSCH

**W**alther von Brauchitsch was in figure and appearance the *beau idéal* of the professional soldier: lithe, wiry, upright, quick and direct in speech and action. The severity of a Napoleonic nose and firmly set lips were softened by expressive brown eyes. He instilled an atmosphere of confidence and sincerity not general among his colleagues. In his dealings with subordinates he showed understanding and verged on pleasantness, which is so rare that it might almost be the subject of a taboo among senior Prussian officers. His bearing in the presence of civilians was marked by perfect manners and pleasant ways.

It was inconceivable that this man, except under the greatest provocation, would lose his balanced temper, and on the fateful occasion when, as will be related, he threw away restraint while with Hitler and his council, he must have been moved by a sense of danger to the army and the nation arising from the Führer's orders.

Not an extremist and not a showman, he did not make such claims to deference as sometimes renders the company of those of high rank difficult to bear. Men under his command who had proved themselves received due credit, and service under him was possibly to be preferred to that of any other in the German Army. His word could be relied on, and he would always accept responsibility for his own actions and decisions.

The same elasticity of mind that made bad manners unnatural to him gave him his facility in foreign languages, as well as the wide range of his education and information. His interest in technical questions and in broader aspects of sociology, economics and philosophy might have made him a great civil administrator, as they certainly taught him how to deal with the diverse characters of other general officers. Knowing that 'reason does not need to raise its voice', he made his wishes and his proper

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authority respected without bullying. Yet no one should think of him as the oily diplomat; he detested that role, and was himself too sincere to assume it.

In von Brauchitsch there was a man of fine character who could be dissociated from the soldier. He could shake hands with a visitor without clicking his heels, and allow one to come into close intellectual contact with him, for his sympathies went beyond the army and its separate life. The charming custom at a public ceremony of having flowers presented by children to the principal person was full of its true grace and meaning when von Brauchitsch had part in it.

He was, in fact, a type of German who would present a helpful and hopeful example in the re-education of the German people after the war, though the type is now rare enough to be conspicuous. It was characteristic of him that in any disaster calling for remedial action on the part of the civilian authorities in a district under his military authority, he would take the first step, even at financial risk to himself. When Commander-in-Chief in East Prussia he would be one of the first on the spot when country villages were devastated by fires, talking to the people, promising them help from the army, inquiring into their immediate needs, all with an ease and grace that left no question of his sincerity or evoked the all too common suggestion, when a commanding general showed sympathy with the civilian public, that he was courting publicity.

As Commander-in-Chief he took a wide view of military necessities and of reasons of State. Convinced that greater Germany was destined to dominate the world, he could not have been gentle in his methods, but there is no reason to associate him with Nazi crimes, especially in the treatment of subject peoples. On grounds of permanent success alone he would have differed from Hitler and his gangsters in their methods of asserting mastery, and he must have repudiated their characteristic brutality in disposing of those who stood in their way. Yet as a militarist he had his illusions, which made him alternate between thinking that he was using the Nazis for his own designs and becoming the instrument of lawless schemes that no man of his antecedents should have acknowledged. At times either his judgment or his integrity was clouded. Recall his address to German soldiers in

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France after Dunkirk: 'We consider the victory already won,' he said. England, he admitted, remained secure, 'but only so long as we choose.' If he believed that, he was unable to grasp all the factors of the situation on land and sea and in the air; if he did not believe it he was lending himself to Hitler's theory that his grandiose purposes were served by fooling the army and the public.

Walther von Brauchitsch was born on the 4th October, 1881, in Berlin, a son of the Prussian General of Cavalry Bernhard von Brauchitsch and Charlotte von Gordon. The family of von Brauchitsch, which originally came from Silesia, moved in the leading social circles of Berlin, and the father's military rank put him on equal footing with any general commanding the Guards or the Imperial Life Bodyguard. To a great extent von Brauchitsch senior belonged to the rare minority of his caste who have earned themselves the attribute of 'enlightened', which meant that he had on occasions broken out of the social and professional conventions which usually hedged in families like his. He was greatly interested in the political movements that pursued liberal and moderately conservative aims and was interested in the fine arts and could be seen at every exhibition of painting and sculpture in Berlin during the late eighties.

It was this rather unusual breadth of mind that influenced the General of Cavalry to send his son Walther to a Berlin grammar school (*Französisches Gymnasium*), and not immediately to the cadet schools. It was not until 1895 that Walther joined the cadet schools near Berlin, which he left as one of their best pupils in 1900. The same year he became a second lieutenant in the Royal Prussian Grenadier Guards No. 3, also known as *Königin Elizabeth*, probably the best Guards regiment in Germany, famous as the *Elizabether*.

With von Brauchitsch's origins his future military career could be regarded as limited only by his capacity. He could be expected to remain in the Guards until he reached field rank, when he could either join the Imperial Court in Berlin as an A.D.C. to the Emperor or accept one of the higher positions that were reserved for officers of such a regiment. The *Elizabether* was the ideal starting point for a young officer.

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But Walther von Brauchitsch began to reveal his character. Not for him the secure and conventional road; he intended to climb higher, and he chose the steeper path. A year after joining the *Elizabether* he asked for a transfer to an artillery regiment, preferably a regiment of the line. None of the men around him understood him, especially another young second lieutenant, von Kleist, who was to fight 39 years later in Rostov-on-Don against Marshal Timoshenko and to lose; for von Kleist took all the assurance of a former *Elizabether* officer into a battle where only the knowledge and skill that von Brauchitsch was then gaining could have availed him. It was von Kleist who led a complete *Elizabether* group against Lieutenant von Brauchitsch, trying to persuade him to alter his plans. In his request for a transfer this group could only see the outbreak of a 'palace rebellion' and the beginning of the end of the social constitution of Berlin's upper ten thousand. But von Brauchitsch had made it plain that in his opinion the technical developments of the new century would demand radical changes in the army. He was convinced that the machine age would sooner or later force the army to make a complete about turn.

In 1901 he joined the 3rd Guards Field Artillery Regiment. He was soon made A.D.C. to a battalion commander, and later to the regimental staff. The officers of this particular regiment, however, were too conscious of their standing as Guards to get the utmost from their artillery work, thus showing something of the shallowness that had made von Brauchitsch leave his Grenadiers.

In 1912 he transferred to the Great General Staff in Berlin as a first lieutenant, where after a year's service he was made a captain. Again in March 1914 he transferred to an operational department of the General Staff, and at the outbreak of the war in August, 1914 he proceeded as a General Staff officer to the staff of the XVI Army Corps at Metz.

Here he saw the heavy fighting that developed west of Metz against the French Third Army. After fighting through Luxembourg and against Longwy, the XVI German Army Corps was the first to take up positions against the French in the sector of Verdun. During the early months of 1914 this French position represented the hinge of the entire French field forces, and the

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German position north and north-west of Verdun stood for the corresponding position with the German field forces.

It was during this period that von Brauchitsch witnessed a military phenomenon that could not have been foreseen by any responsible military leader. The German field armies were massing in August, 1914, for their assault against Belgium and Northern France. The XVI Army Corps deployed from the fortress region of Metz against Luxembourg; the plan was perfect, and any interference in its execution could only lead to disastrous results. Suddenly the Supreme Commander, Kaiser Wilhelm II in his General Headquarters at Bad Kreuznach, ordered a division to be withdrawn for the special protection of his headquarters. The Kaiser gave directions that the division was to be taken from the hinge positions covering Metz and linking the 5th German Army with the 6th German Army. Such a move might have had disastrous results for the Germans, who were about to start their offensive. If the French should recognise this incredible move in time they could concentrate against the German hinge and split the entire German forces in two by a determined push over Metz to Saarbrücken. Von Brauchitsch was present when these orders, signed by the Supreme Commander, arrived at headquarters. Disaster loomed large. For forty-eight hours the situation was obscure; then the frantic efforts of the Chief of the German General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, Junior, succeeded in cancelling the Kaiser's orders. Here von Brauchitsch saw at close quarters how disastrous the interference of any civilian in large scale operations could be, and he frequently referred to it later as an example of what should not be permitted. It certainly made a lasting impression on his military outlook.

He was on the staff of the XVI Army Corps in front of Verdun when the German Verdun offensive started. The fighting round Verdun made heavy demands on the artillery, and von Brauchitsch was able to train himself in the use of artillery not only in such strength as is allotted to a corps; for during that offensive he very often controlled movements of massed artillery up to the strength of eight or nine corps. He was, in fact, the specialist of the corps which had held the positions in front of Verdun since 1914, and he knew the country better than any other German officer. More valuable than the technical training given by Verdun

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was the experience, supremely useful to a mind that could analyse it, of a colossal failure. He recognised by first hand experience much of what made Falkenhayn's *Brennofen* futile.

This plan had provided that with continuous German attacks without the gaining of ground or positions, the French would be forced to send division after division into a blast furnace in which they would be consumed until the whole French Army had been so reduced that it could no longer put up any fighting. Falkenhayn had calculated that time would be on his side, and that the initiative would never be wrested from him. Von Brauchitsch noted that as the weeks and months of carnage passed, it was the Allies who, in spite of severe strain, had the advantage of time, and with their offensive on the Somme were able to wrest the initiative from the Germans. Whoever heard von Brauchitsch lecture on these subjects was struck by his memory for even the smallest detail of what had happened during Verdun, and by the way in which he marshalled his facts and arguments to prove that offensives should always be executed in the shortest time.

Towards the end of the war he was transferred as first General Staff officer to the staff of the Guard Reserve Corps, one of the last corps to retreat to Germany in complete order.

Von Brauchitsch's service was not interrupted in 1918. In November, 1919, after the main work of the demobilisation of the Guard Reserve Corps had been finished, he was appointed General Staff Officer on the staff of the Army District No. II in Stettin. Here he fulfilled General Staff duties without being able to use his knowledge of artillery, a position with which no active officer of his training could long be satisfied. A year later he received his appointment to the staff of the Artillery Regiment No. 2, and in 1921 he was made Chief of the Second Battery of the Artillery Regiment No. 2. The following year he was transferred to the Reichswehr Ministry, where as a major he worked as assistant in the Artillery Department.

The problems that now confronted von Brauchitsch were largely concerned with the reorganisation of nucleus artillery formations and with the realisation of lessons to be learned from the closing months of the war. Von Brauchitsch took a large part in putting these lessons into practice. They fell into two important sections, one, concerning the future position of artil-

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lery formations; and two, the types of guns to be used in them. One of the first alterations was to scrap the classifications of 'light artillery', 'medium artillery' and 'heavy artillery'. A certain decentralisation of artillery forces took place, and the infantry divisions were given an amount of artillery exceeding even the strength of the normal divisional artillery of the war of 1914-18. The heavier artillery, which used to be known during and before the last war as 'corps artillery', now became 'reinforcement artillery'.

During von Brauchitsch's time in the Reichswehr Ministry this reorganisation was executed mainly by bringing that artillery primarily under the orders of the infantry divisional commander, the central idea being that close collaboration between infantry and artillery could only be guaranteed if the latter were incorporated to the highest degree in the structure of the formations of the former. Von Brauchitsch was not in a position to do much in the reorganisation of gun material or in its improvement; and that had to be deferred to a later date.

He spent three years at this work. He was promoted lieutenant-colonel in April 1925 and during the same year, in December, he again had to take up a troop command, as is usual for General Staff officers after a long term of service in Berlin. He took over command of the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Artillery Regiment, and in November 1927 was appointed Chief of Staff of the 6th Division in Münster, in Westphalia, one of the strongest garrisons in western Germany. In 1928 he was made a colonel, and in 1930, after his many years of experience with troops under peace-time conditions, he returned to the Reichswehr Ministry, where he took over the department for army education. This term disguised its true nature, that of army expansion.

The time had now come for von Brauchitsch to go deeper into the question of guns and munitions, which he had had to leave alone when he was in the same office as an assistant. As chief of his old department he ordered radical changes. Preparations were made to assign to each infantry division two artillery regiments, the first composed of nine batteries. Four batteries had 7.5 field guns, two 10.5 cm. howitzers, and three 15 cm. howitzers. The second artillery regiment was also composed of nine batteries, but with guns of much heavier calibre: three batteries of 10.5 cm. howitzers, four of 15 cm. howitzers, two of 21 cm. mortars.

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At the same time foundations were laid for the introduction of a new gun, the 88 mm. gun, conspicuous by its long barrel. In this von Brauchitsch took particular interest. The 88 mm. gun was originally thought of as useful for counter-battery work; but during von Brauchitsch's time in the Reichswehr Ministry it was adapted into a fairly heavy anti-aircraft gun, easy to handle and completely mechanised. As was shown under field conditions in the second World War, it was so effective that it became a dual purpose gun both against aircraft and against tanks. Its introduction in its new form was one of von Brauchitsch's main achievements.

As head of this department of army expansion he did not follow the usual line of his brother officers in completely breaking with existing rules and regulations and with the limitations laid down by the Treaty of Versailles. If in his departmental work he encountered legal obstacles, he over-rode them only upon the written orders of his superiors. Von Brauchitsch was accused by both friends and foes inside the Reichswehr Ministry of having a 'legality complex'. The violation of agreements accepted by the German Government and its military advisers was against his personal conception of honour. Von Brauchitsch knew that in this he was almost alone, and that none of his friends was deterred by the same scruples. 'Secret' and 'under cover' were terms not in his dictionary.

He did his duty, and he did it well, but he refused to make his job easier by tricks that he could not defend as an officer and a man of integrity. Even when he was in danger of coming into conflict with the new order of leadership which knew no laws that interfered with its aims, his promotion continued. He was made a major-general in 1931, and inspector of artillery in 1932. Political events of that fateful year left him unmoved, and while almost every officer inside the Reichswehr Ministry was standing by to receive orders to overthrow the legal constitution of the German Republic and kick out of office the legitimate Government in Prussia with its ministers in Berlin, von Brauchitsch stuck strictly to his job. There was more than the so-called 'legality complex' about him, more than the pride of an officer of a passing age. In his spare time he attended many lectures at Berlin University and with professors and students discussed



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questions of social and economic interest. He was not fenced in by the military outlook, as were so many of his colleagues.

For example, he was fully acquainted with the conditions leading up to the world economic crisis that started in Wall Street in 1929 and spread to Central Europe in 1930. The rise in votes for the Communist Party in Germany was no mystery to him, and though it would be going too far to say that he sympathised with the broad masses of the workers, he was conscious of conditions among the working classes of his country that had naturally led to widespread discontent. When the representatives of the firm which issued the German *Who's Who* asked him for his particular hobbies, he wrote, to the surprise of his brother officers, 'economic and political questions of the day'.

Walther von Brauchitsch was too much the professional soldier to have formulated a scheme of things for himself that would fit into any political party, but one thing was certain; he did not believe in the doctrine of the Junker class. So thorough had his studies been that he could surprise his subordinate staff officers with a lecture that showed profound knowledge of the Manchester Liberal School and the leading principles governing the so-called German Historical School. When during these years he rejected the party principles of the National Socialist Party, he did so not from fear of that 'neo-socialism' that was the main attraction for the workers in Hitler's hazy ideals. He was sociologist enough to recognise and to explain that none of the many promises of that party could be fulfilled because each one contradicted the other.

Von Brauchitsch was thus the perfect contrast to another general of the Reichswehr, Kurt von Schleicher, who boasted of being the 'Socialist General'. Whilst von Schleicher was nothing but a wire-puller, and a man who used the slogans of the time for his own ends without being a sincere advocate of betterment and improvement, von Brauchitsch, though in fact he sought no political position, nor desired any popular following, could have entered the political field possessed of sincerity and an instructed mind. He was the better soldier for standing well beyond politics, and this quality was recognised, for in February 1933 he became Commander-in-Chief in the First Military

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District in East Prussia and Chief of the 1st Division in Königsberg. In October he was promoted lieutenant-general.

In East Prussia, an officer of this rank and command could not altogether avoid internal or external political controversy had he wished, less so because under the national tradition every issue had finally to be decided by the stronger of the personal authorities involved. His first clash was with the local Gauleiter of the Party and head of the civil administration of the province of East Prussia. Koch was an individual of dubious qualifications. He was one of the gangster types who would meet political opponents with violence, one of those likely to be the cause of trouble because of the unaccustomed power now given them by the central government in Berlin. Charges of defalcation had been made more than once against Herr Koch, who had neither political integrity nor social standing. The Commander-in-Chief of the East Prussian military district certainly could not receive such a man privately, whatever contacts were inevitable on official occasions; but Koch, conscious of his chequered record, never complained of this to the central Government in Berlin. He knew that he could not stand up to inquiry. Another incident had to be manufactured to draw the attention of the Government in Berlin to the attitude of the military chief.

Von Brauchitsch was engaged in constructing field fortifications near the Masurian Lakes in East Prussia, and for this purpose declared certain areas prohibited to civilians. The Black Guard command in Berlin had the sinister notion that special manoeuvres of their SS formations might strengthen the morale of the East Prussian population and impress the domineering Junker caste which was still (up to 1934-35) in a strong position in that province. The leader of the SS, Himmler, was not well informed of von Brauchitsch's political views and classed him with the Junkers.

It came to von Brauchitsch's knowledge that these SS manoeuvres were to be combined with a campaign of persecution against the Jews in East Prussia and against both the Protestant and Catholic Churches in the district, where strong religious feelings were still in evidence. The General countered the move in the military field.

When the SS went to East Prussia they intended de-training

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in the special military areas. On their arrival they were received by formations of the Reichswehr, who were under strict orders to prevent at any cost any storm trooper from setting foot on the shores of the Masurian Lakes. Having no choice, the SS turned back, but Himmler launched a sharp protest and the entire matter came up for arbitration by Hitler. Von Brauchitsch defended himself on grounds of duty, saying laconically that: 'Civilians are not allowed to enter that area'. Nor would he enter into any discussion of that order. He did not acknowledge the military status of the SS formations, and here, as on similar occasions in subsequent years, he was militarily correct and unassailable on political grounds. He acted as a soldier, but unlike his military colleagues in Berlin he also accepted his limitations as such. He was not interested in the ambitious plans of the Commander-in-Chief, General Baron von Fritsch, though he was fully aware of them. His duties as Commander-in-Chief of Germany's most eastern province occupied all his time, especially as he was now called upon to make a special survey of the armed forces of the Soviet Union, a commission which he executed with unusual energy. We shall return to the results of this study when dealing with the position he took up shortly before the German attack on Russia in 1941.

The dismissal of Werner von Fritsch as Commander-in-Chief of the German armed forces in 1938 was a severe test of the stability of the German internal administration of that time. By that act Hitler achieved a major victory over the Reichswehr clique, and for that very reason the appointment of so uncompromising a soldier as von Brauchitsch as the new head of the army was a complete surprise. Given Hitler's policy of displacing the supreme authority of the army in its own sphere, it seemed unaccountable, and could only be explained by Hitler's cautiousness. He still moved by steps of apparent compromise. Von Fritsch represented the class that were possibly the most dangerous competitors in his struggle for personal world domination by means of the power of the Reich and the efficiency of the German armed forces. Von Brauchitsch was certainly not a prominent Nazi sympathiser; indeed, some informed observers among German army circles of 1938 expected him to inspire an even stronger anti-Nazi attitude in the German High Command than

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had prevailed under von Fritsch. But such expectations took too little account of von Brauchitsch's sense of discipline.

His appointment as Commander-in-Chief took place in dramatic circumstances. Called upon in the Reich Chancellery to give his opinion on the events of February 1938, he was reported to have explained to the Supreme Commander, Adolf Hitler, that the influence of civilians in military affairs inevitably led to disastrous results. He agreed that it was not the task of the Commander-in-Chief to dabble in internal politics, but his first point was put before Hitler in an unmistakable and impressive way. Von Brauchitsch, it is known, is the only German general who has ever been able to tell Hitler in the presence of others that the days were over when a lance corporal could assume the position of a Napoleon. And that he did in no uncertain terms. His appointment in February 1938, and his uncompromising insistence on his military responsibility, accounted for the fact that, despite Hitler's known assumption of divine wisdom, he did not interfere with military operations during the Polish, Norwegian, French or Balkan campaigns.

It was significant, again, that the new Commander-in-Chief retained the personal staff and the adjutants of his predecessor. After the violent conflict between Hitler and von Fritsch, impossible to conceal, this was proof of his strength. Only a few days later in the presence of other officers he rebuked one who was gaining prominence in the Reichswehr disproportionate to his professional abilities—General Wilhelm Keitel. Keitel by this time held the important position of military under-secretary of state with general's rank. But von Brauchitsch did not hide his contempt for men who, like Keitel, climbed in their careers by means of intrigue; and the relations between the two were not happy.

In all this the attitude of Hitler was understandable. A war was pending; operations might start any moment. The alternatives to von Brauchitsch were two men who were both politically 'black sheep', von Leeb and von Rundstedt, whose collusion with von Fritsch had led to their temporary retirement in February 1938. General von Bock, who might have been among the 'possibles', hardly possessed the necessary qualifications. Keitel had no claim to consideration.

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In internal organisation von Brauchitsch distinguished himself by two orders which he issued as soon as he took up his new position. He laid down hard and fast rules about the feeding of the German soldier, and the schedule which he had drawn up after having investigated the question from every point of view and consulted the opinion of more than two thousand scientists was as follows:

### *Breakfast*

$\frac{1}{2}$  lb. pure rye bread

Coffee mixture or tea

1 oz. butter or margarine or  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. marmalade

### *Dinner*

$\frac{1}{2}$  lb. bread

$\frac{1}{2}$  pint soup

6 oz. boneless meat or 12 oz. fish fillet

$\frac{1}{2}$  oz. fat (lard or butter)

2 lb. potatoes and seasonable vegetables.

### *Supper*

$\frac{1}{2}$  lb. bread

$\frac{1}{2}$  pint coffee

1 oz. sugar

$1\frac{1}{4}$  oz. butter or margarine

9 oz. fresh sausage

Once a week potatoes to be served in their jackets, light beer to be ration issue on field manoeuvres and on strenuous duties; cigarettes ration issue also.

This schedule was accompanied by another order re-introducing solitary confinement and darkened cells as a punishment. At the same time von Brauchitsch reminded his commanders of the standing orders that in certain emergencies a soldier was entitled to use arms against civilians in Germany. Arms might be so used:

- (1) To ward off an attack or threat with direct danger to life and limb or to break down opposition;
- (2) To compel obedience to the order to give up arms, or in the case of assemblies of people an order to disperse;
- (3) Against prisoners or persons temporarily arrested who try to escape;
- (4) To stop persons trying to escape after a cry of 'Halt';
- (5) To protect persons or things placed under their guard after a

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'halt' warning. Hand grenades or dynamite might be used in a case of absolute necessity, but firearms were not to be used when other weapons would serve.

This stern reminder did not pass without comment, especially among Party men in higher positions, for nobody knew exactly what was the Commander-in-Chief's purpose.

A scheme of army welfare was completed according to which N.C.O.s who had served for twelve years or more could apply for special jobs in the State service (post office, customs, etc.) or if they declined such a position could receive the equivalent of £760 in cash to open a business of their own, but if they preferred to go as farmers to the border districts of Germany they were to receive the equivalent of £1,350 in cash to buy land and farming implements; in the latter case special credits would be arranged for them by State organisations. The perfection of this social scheme was one of the things that had matured in von Brauchitsch's mind while studying social conditions many years before and it came now to practical results. A further example of his solicitude for the comfort of the troops was an order for six thousand pianos for their entertainment, the first of which was installed in the Führer's headquarters train.

These innovations and social improvements, though they were also accompanied by a more severe tightening of the disciplinary side of army life, were not welcomed in certain Government quarters where it was considered that welfare schemes should be reserved for certain institutions of the Nazi Party. The first to express this view was Dr. Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister. It was impossible to attack von Brauchitsch on this ground, but instead he instituted a whispering campaign against the Commander-in-Chief. It was known that von Brauchitsch had had differences in his family life, and that a divorce from Frau von Brauchitsch was taking place. Immediately after the divorce von Brauchitsch paid his addresses to Frau Charlotte Schmidt in Bad Salzbrunn in Silesia, the daughter of a retired high court judge, Herr Rueffer. These domestic events were regarded by Dr. Goebbels as a suitable background for slander. He put out stories that von Brauchitsch had only been able to take divorce proceedings because Hitler had backed him, and that certain funds at the disposal of the Führer had been used in this connection.

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Dr. Goebbels was not very successful in this campaign, for at an early date von Brauchitsch was able to trace the source of the rumours. The result was that the Minister for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment was summoned to the Commander-in-Chief's office, where on a sunny summer afternoon the frightened little Doctor received a lecture on proceedings governing a duel between an officer and an academician. Goebbels is no hero, and the interview sufficed to stop the rumour within twenty-four hours.

Goebbels now passed the ball to the Reich Youth Leader, Baldur von Schirach, who preferred the method of indirect attack. On his estate in Bavaria von Schirach was neighbour to two nephews of von Brauchitsch—Manfred von Brauchitsch, the racing ace, and his brother Harald. A gamekeeper in the service of von Schirach was said one day to have denounced these two brothers for slandering Frau von Schirach, who, indeed, was not exactly Caesar's wife. When on the local railway station next day the two brothers von Brauchitsch met von Schirach, he slapped Manfred's face. Manfred asked for a duel, but von Schirach answered that he was not a good shot. Whereupon Manfred seemed satisfied.

A few days later—we are still in the summer of 1938—there was another scene. The two brothers lived with their mother in a flat, which was forced at night by von Schirach and twelve men of his bodyguard. Without explanation they demolished the flat, locked up the mother in a cupboard, while Manfred and Harald, held helpless by the bodyguards, were beaten by von Schirach with a riding whip.

Manfred and Harald, remembering von Schirach's excuse for not accepting a duel, now resorted to law, and sued him for damages. In court the defendant put forward the objection that he was a Reichstag Deputy, and as such could not be sued in open court, but by pressing the charge the two brothers obtained damages, which von Schirach paid.

That was how the Nazis worked. In all this neither Manfred nor Harald nor their mother were the real quarry of the Nazi Party. Their larger aim was to compromise the Commander-in-Chief, who was also head of the von Brauchitsch family. They failed. Von Brauchitsch married Frau Charlotte Schmidt on

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24th September 1938 in Bad Salzbrunn, allowing himself six hours leave for the wedding ceremony and then returning to the autumn manoeuvres of the German Army. The Commander-in-Chief had reason to be at his post. While the lesser Nazi gangsters were extending their Party control by intrigue and violence, the arch-intriguer brought about the next coup in his vast programme of international crime. Czechoslovakia was the victim.

The occupation of the Czechoslovak State was executed under a plan with which von Brauchitsch had little to do. He is known to have given Hitler this warning: 'If you want the German Army for bluff in this undertaking you can have it. For anything more serious we are not yet prepared'. (With the significance of that warning in mind, it may well be asked again whether appeasement as a cautionary measure was really necessary.)

It is noticeable that during the subsequent administration of Czechoslovakia by the German Government, von Brauchitsch endeavoured, though ineffectively, to give meaning to the word protectorate. He was interested in the country as a basis for production, and such a plan could be only obstructed, not assisted, by the gangster methods of the Gestapo and the Party, who were allowed a free hand under the 'protector' Baron Konstantin von Neurath. Here the Commander-in-Chief's military correctness, whether it is regarded as meritorious or not, was his limitation. For the head of the army was essentially the instrument of Hitler.

At the end of January 1939 von Brauchitsch was confronted by a problem that had assisted in the downfall of von Fritsch. Hitler had ordered the complete abolition of compulsory church services in the German Army. He had also dispensed with the religious service at the swearing in of young recruits. This order was issued by him as Supreme Commander, without consulting the Commander-in-Chief. Though von Brauchitsch was more concerned about the affront to his personal authority than about the attacks upon religion, he did voice the opinion of a large part of the army by defending compulsory church services. His views did not prevail. The order for the abolition of church services remained in force, and the clergy in the army lost much of their status.

So the rift between the two men widened. Von Brauchitsch declined to be present at the launching of the battleship *Bismarck*,



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nor was he at the opening of the Great Automobile Exhibition in Berlin in February 1939. On such occasions the chief representative of the German armed forces was expected to be present. Hitler offered a sop at this stage of the proceedings which, with his astonishing egotism, he may really have regarded as a lordly gesture: he conferred the Golden Party Insignia on his Commander-in-Chief for services rendered to the armed forces. Presented to any senior officer, not to mention the head of the army, such a decoration was nothing but a slight, a piece of impudent sarcasm; and, in addition, von Brauchitsch was not likely to feel flattered when he heard that the Insignia had at the same time been awarded to Keitel.

Von Brauchitsch never wore it on his tunic—in fact he has never been seen wearing anything but the Iron Cross I and II class which he won in the last war. This, of course, did not pass unnoticed, and was to be remembered when the crisis came.

Meanwhile one of the main tasks set for the Commander-in-Chief as a result of the conclusion of the Axis pact was an examination of the war potentialities of Italy. His contacts with his opposite number in that country, and with various other senior officers of the Italian Army, were frequent; but the job was not an easy one because he had to deal with a certain amount of bluff on the part of Mussolini, who wanted to sell his military collaboration for economic support on the part of the Reich. Von Fritsch had discovered earlier that all was not well with the Italian armed forces, and that quite a considerable proportion of the published armament programme remained on paper. In his efforts to study the Italian Army mobilisation plans, von Brauchitsch was constantly interfered with by the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop who, as the chief architect of the Axis alliance wanted to see his work consolidated at any price.

On 5th April 1939 von Brauchitsch and General Pariani, the Italian Secretary of State for War, met at Innsbruck. Italy occupied Albania immediately afterwards, and two events followed beyond the Axis borders that were of major significance for the future. First, Great Britain introduced compulsory military service; secondly, the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Stoyadinovitch, declared his leaning, long since formed, towards the Axis partners, despite his country's sympathy for England and all that England

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stood for in Balkan memory. The German talks with Italy were now enlarged, and von Brauchitsch went to Italy, where he saw Mussolini at his retreat at Rocca della Caminate, near Forlì. Also taking part at these conferences were the Italian Minister of Finance, Admiral Thaon di Revel, as well as General Teruzzi (colonies) and General Russo (militia).

The obvious deficiencies of the Italian army were glossed over by the Italians with the excuse that the Italian colonies would now more than ever serve to guard the southern flank of the European continent during any future war. General Teruzzi's reports were more rosy than credible; they were of such exaggerated excellence that von Brauchitsch made up his mind to inspect Cyrenaica and Tripolitania for himself. For this journey, on which he was again accompanied by Pariani, he used special 'Gibli' planes, adapted for flying during sandstorms. Yet, as if the weather conspired to expose the inefficiency of Italian preparations, the party was forced down in exactly such a sandstorm as had been guarded against. This was at Ara Fileni, after Marshal Balbo, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Tripolitania, had personally made all arrangements for the plane's safe landing. The impression von Brauchitsch gained was naturally unfavourable.

On the occasion of the German Commander-in-Chief's return to Rome, Mussolini ordered one of his fantastic parades, in which 30,000 men, 300 guns, 700 machine-guns and a thousand cars with many reserve officers passed before the Duce. In his subsequent speech, which was ostensibly addressed to the masses outside the Palazzo Venezia, but which was intended for the German Commander-in-Chief he said: 'You have seen a memorable military parade. Undoubtedly our military strength is great, but the decision of our hearts is still greater, and when and if the hour comes we shall prove it.' Still von Brauchitsch was not convinced, and he returned to Berlin with the conviction that Italy would become a liability rather than an asset in any future war.

When von Ribbentrop saw that the very qualified opinion which the Commander-in-Chief had formed of Italy as an ally was about to break up the Axis pact he used an argument against which von Brauchitsch had no reply. Von Ribbentrop, who was accepted by Hitler as an authority on Great Britain and British questions, said that the time-lag in British rearmament would be

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so great that even the most imperfect Italian preparations in the Middle East would be sufficient to give the Axis control of the Mediterranean for years to come. Von Ribbentrop had also met Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister at the Villa d'Este, and had received the Italian version of the Commander-in-Chief's tour of inspection, and as a further argument he had represented to Hitler that von Brauchitsch was not objective in his report on the military effectiveness of Italy, but was influenced by his dislike of anything Fascist or National Socialist. Again Hitler was inclined to believe von Ribbentrop and his supporters inside the German Government.

While international high tension continued, von Brauchitsch indirectly replied to von Ribbentrop in an address to the Nazi Party district leaders in the Palatinate in western Germany, where he expressed his faith in the Führer in terms that were new to him. 'The German Army will hoist the German flag wherever Hitler commands,' he declared. The soldier indeed seemed to be giving place to the diplomat. A complete accord was reached at Walhausen, and was confirmed two days later during a dinner party in Karlsruhe. Clearly von Brauchitsch had decided not to insist on the opinion he had formed of Italy's military weakness.

In a further effort to counter the political machinations of von Ribbentrop and the rest of the Party and to establish his position with Hitler, von Brauchitsch dropped all reserve in references to Poland, making a more combative declaration than any that had yet come from even Goebbels or von Ribbentrop. One of the most conspicuous examples was his address to 2,500 cadets at the Tannenberg monument in East Prussia, when he said: 'I wish to emphasise that this land (East Prussia) is ancient German land. Hitler knew that when he said that it was important to free Prussia truly and completely. To affirm to-day that Prussia is German is an answer to those who put forward supposed claims to this territory, and who would make believe that the strength of its maintenance as German is no longer what it was. That is a mistake which a soldier does not like to refute with words. We do not seek battle but we fear it still less'.

With this speech von Brauchitsch, with a disappointing collapse of principle, fell completely into line with the propaganda that had been issued by Goebbels' office on the Wilhelmplatz. To attempt

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to brand Poland as an aggressor against East Prussia was transparent chicanery, for the world and the simplest of Germans knew that nothing was further from the intention of the Polish Government than to attack a single square mile of German territory. For Nazi policy, however, the utterances of the Commander-in-Chief at this particular moment had a weighty effect, if only because his statements had always been cautious and based on facts rather than purposeful assumptions. His collaboration with the German propaganda machine at this stage may in fact have been of decisive value, and this should be taken seriously into account by those who would separate German militarists from the Nazi Party.

At the grand strategical conference of all German leaders presided over by Hitler on 8th August, 1939 von Brauchitsch examined the military situation as it might develop in the next few weeks or days. Here von Brauchitsch launched his master-stroke in diplomacy against some of his colleagues in the army whom he had always considered unqualified for the positions they held. After a strategical survey of Europe, backed by the researches of all departments of the German General Staff and by plans that had been formed within the Reichswehr Ministry during the preceding twelve years, von Brauchitsch gave his judgment on the military Under Secretary of State, the man who was ambitious enough to think he was the close rival of the Commander-in-Chief—General Wilhelm Keitel. The case which Keitel attempted to make contrasted sharply with the calm but acute and comprehensive arguments of his accuser, and now Hitler saw more clearly than ever that he could not do without a Commander-in-Chief of von Brauchitsch's calibre.

Before the start of operations against Poland, von Brauchitsch had made it a cardinal point that he should be assured of Russian neutrality. He was possibly better informed than anyone else about the strength of the Russian Army, and on such a subject his judgment was unquestioned inside the German Army. At the same time it is not true, as has been reported, that he had threatened to resign should Russia not remain neutral. It was understood that the condition of Russian neutrality was assumed by the German High Command. The Polish campaign thus started on the lines of a plan that was almost identical with that drawn up by von

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Fritsch, and it was conducted with no interference whatever on the part of Hitler or the Party or the Government.

After the conclusion of the Polish campaign, Hitler, intoxicated by the heady wine of victory, returned to his headquarters at Godesberg on the Rhine with the idea that a small-scale German offensive in the sector of Saarbrücken, the only point where the French had shown some activity, was now called for. In this he was seconded by Keitel, who took every opportunity to confirm the Supreme Commander in any opinion that might clash with that of the actual Commander-in-Chief. Von Brauchitsch cut short all these plans by tendering his resignation.

Though the resulting tension inside the German High Command was concealed as far as possible, some information did leak out to neutral countries, and at the end of October 1939 the Public Relations Department of the German High Command was asked by a newspaper correspondent whether it was true that the Commander-in-Chief was tendering his resignation. Keitel, who learned of this question, and who had just been severely snubbed by von Brauchitsch, instructed one of his minor officials to give the following answer: 'No German Commander-in-Chief can resign in time of war. He might, however, be dismissed from his position.' This was the usual vindictive way in which Keitel revenged himself.

Like the plan of campaign against Poland, the operational part of the campaign against Norway had also been drawn up before von Brauchitsch took over, but the immediate organisation of the forces for this amphibious undertaking was absolutely under his personal control. The assembling of German shipping as early as February 1940 in the Baltic ports of Danzig, Gdynia and Memel, was executed under his personal orders. The subsequent transfer of these forces to the western Baltic ports, and the contingent orders to the naval command, were also given by von Brauchitsch, though he allowed full credit to the Secretary of State of the Air Ministry, General Milch.

In the campaign in the west, starting 10th May 1940 von Brauchitsch's responsibility for the design and execution was more complete. Far less than in the case of Poland and Norway could he rely on plans that had been made many years before. Both von Fritsch and the first Chief of the General Staff, General Beck, had

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prepared plans for such a large scale operation, and certainly the German Army did not embark on this very important phase of the war without having previously studied all available schemes: but the final touches were added by von Brauchitsch. In peacetime conferences of the German General Staff and in discussions between chiefs of the operational departments of the Reichswehr Ministry, he never tired of pointing out errors made during the operations in August and September 1914 that led to the German disaster of the Battle of the Marne.

In these discussions von Brauchitsch always put himself in the place of the French Commander-in-Chief, Joffre, and he painted pictures of possible French counter-strokes to German plans of invasion. Von Brauchitsch was not a complete believer in the Schlieffen Plan. He agreed that a push through Holland and Belgium against Northern France was the only conceivable operation for the first part of the German offensive against France, but differed regarding the second part of this operation. In substantiating this difference of opinion he referred to events before the Battle of the Marne, and upon them based his strongest argument in favour of the plan which finally broke resistance in France in 1940.

Von Brauchitsch believed that from the start of operations in 1914 the German Army was running into a trap. He showed that General Joffre's arrangements as early as 25th August 1914 must lead to the Battle of the Marne, and that this should have been recognised by the German High Command. The formation of the French 6th Army under General Manoury, which was more or less a detached body to the east of the main French forces, and the elastic manoeuvres of the French 5th Army a fortnight before the Battle of the Marne began, operated according to the plans of the French Commander-in-Chief to draw the German 1st and 2nd Armies into this very trap. Joffre, according to this argument, had succeeded in a difficult task despite the fact that he had to ask General Lanrezac to cede the command of the 5th French Army to General Franchet d'Esperey, an emergency arrangement which, calling for cool nerves, had been executed with great skill.

The movement of the 1st German Army under von Kluck and the 2nd German Army under von Bülow over the Marne and in a south-easterly direction upon the Seine, if successful, would

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have forced the bulk of the French Army to fight with a reversed front, that is to say, the French would have faced Paris instead of defending Paris. But, so argued von Brauchitsch, would not any present French Commander-in-Chief, and especially General Gamelin, who had been at Joffre's headquarters during those crucial days in 1914, be certain to repeat a manoeuvre that had once been so successful?

Von Brauchitsch calculated that the chances of complete success in forcing the French armies to fight with a reversed front were only one in ten, and that the overwhelming probability was that the German offensive group would see a repetition of the Battle of the Marne. With this convincing argument he was able to reconstruct the theories of the German General Staff, and to establish that the main German objective in any campaign against France should be the Channel coast, not immediately the south-eastern interior of France. According to this view the outflanking of the Maginot Line and the penetration of south-eastern territory was of importance only during a second phase of any campaign against France. The splitting of the main Allied forces was of primary importance, and had to be achieved in the first phase of any offensive. Von Brauchitsch acted in accordance with this plan when operations started.

The strategic principle of von Brauchitsch's conception was to isolate a strong group of Allied forces in Belgium or Northern France, and at the same time to paralyse the remainder of the Allied forces on a line roughly from Paris to the north-western end of the Maginot Line. In all this the German initiative was essential because, if the dictation of movement to the Allies was to cease or be interrupted, then the problem that had led to the Battle of the Marne would again arise. Any lack of initiative on the German side would inevitably result in a serious threat to the German right wing.

Let us take an example. The B.E.F. and the French Fifth Army isolated in Belgium and North Western France were kept on the defensive until they ceased to become operational formations. If that process had been neglected for only a day or two the same Allied forces would have at once assumed the role which the successful 6th French Army had assumed during the Battle of the Marne in 1914, and would have fallen on to the flank of the

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Germans. The danger that here loomed up for von Brauchitsch was that a larger repetition of the Battle of the Marne could be fought somewhere on the line between Sedan and Luxembourg. In all this the Commander-in-Chief was able to the fullest extent to use the new tactical advantages given to the execution of such a plan by the existence of armoured formations that possessed the speed necessary to achieve quick exploitation of initial success.

Even after the Battle of France it was held in many Allied and neutral circles—to some extent even in less informed German military circles—that von Brauchitsch employed in their essentials the ideas of the Schlieffen Plan of 1912. In reality the Commander-in-Chief followed his own lines of thought. To think that the Germans achieved their victory simply by the supremacy of their material and superior tactics is to give von Brauchitsch less than his due.

The campaign in the west added to the importance of the Commander-in-Chief's position in Germany. Such schemings on the part of von Ribbentrop and Goebbels as preceded the opening of the war in 1939 could not be repeated in war-time. His place in German estimation, as in that of the German armed forces, was established by success, but this could not be said of the Government, still less of the Nazi Party. The practical consequences became apparent as soon as the Russian campaign started. The military formations of the Party, the élite divisions of the Waffen SS, which up to that time had not been under fire except to a small extent in the Balkan campaign, were now in their entirety put at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief, and thus largely withdrawn from the control of Himmler. The main idea in the creation of this force had been to retain a crack corps a hundred per cent fanatically Hitlerite that would offset the power and prestige of the military caste in Germany. Though comparatively small in numbers, the significance of this Nazi home force became greater the more deeply the Wehrmacht became engaged in field operations and the SS became the sole armed power on the home front.

Von Brauchitsch ordered these divisions to be distributed among the Army groups that were now attacking Russia. Though Himmler might have watched this development with misgivings,



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he was helpless, in the spring and summer of 1941, to do anything about it.

The German motive in attacking Russia has been misread by public opinion again and again. Naturally there has been a strong presumption that Hitler attacked against the better judgment of his generals, and even that some of the military leaders were deceived up to the last moment. This view is but partially true. Von Brauchitsch, as the most easterly independent Reichswehr commander during the years preceding his appointment to the Army Group in Leipzig, had made a thorough study of the general construction of the Red Army. In this he was assisted by the foremost German panzer specialist, General Heinz Guderian, who had closely examined the Russian mechanised forces. Both men came to the conclusion that Russia was stronger than was evident in watching her peace-time military manoeuvres; and the operations of the Russo-Finnish war in 1939-40 were even more misleading.

It is possible to show that the chief of the German High Command was under no illusion about Russian strength. His military dispositions and his plan of attack were evidence of foreknowledge. Von Braushitsch was one of the followers of the German military school of thought that had long been on its guard against 'conquests of geography'. The trisection of the entire German force—von Leeb in the north, von Bock in the centre, von Rundstedt in the south—was disposed with the object of dividing the entire Russian field army during the first few weeks and months without being compelled to wage battles many hundreds or, as it might have been, over a thousand miles inside Russia. The three German bodies of operations—their strength went far beyond that of army groups—were to link up after certain advances behind the Russians, and then fight battles of annihilation. It followed that each of these formations in its entirety was part of an enormous pincer movement.

Operations in Russia, however, developed differently because the Russian General Staff was on its guard. The pincers did come into action but they protruded from the individual groups that should, as a whole, have been part of a larger pincer, and the groups themselves operated independently instead of working together. In this lies the first cause of the failure of the German

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campaign in Russia in 1941. To a man of von Brauchitsch's mental calibre and strategical training, such a development must have become clear soon after the campaign started. In fact, as the campaign went forward to its ineffective end, a clash of opinion became apparent between Hitler as Supreme Commander and his immediate entourage, made up of officers less gifted than von Brauchitsch and some of the members of his High Command.

The following account of what led to the final dismissal of Walther von Brauchitsch as Commander-in-Chief of the German armed forces is taken from reliable neutral sources whose representatives were able to watch events on the spot, and this has been supplemented with material that has since reached the writer from a source of unquestionable integrity.

Before the last assault on Moscow—which was executed against the advice and without the assistance of von Brauchitsch—the problem under discussion inside the German High Command, in which Hitler took an active part, was the demand by von Brauchitsch for a withdrawal to a safe and secure winter line west of Smolensk, running through part of the Baltic States and ending in the western part of the Ukraine. Von Brauchitsch wanted to play for safety. Hitler, as Supreme Commander, did not agree, and though he had kept quiet and abstained from interfering in military operations during the previous German campaigns, he thought that the time had come to make a stand, especially after the reverses, not to be concealed, which the German armed forces and their professional leaders had now suffered in Russia. The usually composed Commander-in-Chief is reported to have lost his temper.

What did this mean? Nothing is rarer among those holding great power than toleration of outspoken criticism of their own judgment and actions. Even Caesar was no exception, and one of the kinder things said of Napoleon was that he could suffer and forgive even insolence in his favoured colleagues if only it were uttered in private. An eminent public man who is not a saint must be governed by vanity and the fear that in allowing his conduct to be questioned he will lose prestige in the eyes of others, though he certainly will not recognise such pettiness in himself and will, as far as possible, crush his critics as a duty to his high office and to the State he serves. Personal vindictiveness, by no means an

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unusual failing with leaders of all nationalities, tends to get mixed with what they call national honour.

Could Hitler, who had out-Heroded Herod and demanded worship from other men, be expected to brook the exposure of being put in the wrong in his council on a military question, and by a man known by all present to be immeasurably his superior in all military matters? Hitler, who had taken the place of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and had before him the example of that strident war lord's 'Who opposes me him will I shatter'? Hitler, who long before, when declaring the will of the Nazi Party, had warned the German nation: 'Those who oppose us will be broken'?

The issue was so clear that one so perceptive as the then Commander-in-Chief must have known the risk. It was to be Hitler or himself and the army. Even if he knew he must lose, he might well have decided that he would no longer play for safety, or commit himself more deeply to the gangster Hitler. It was a late decision, when we remember von Fritsch, but a decision it probably was. And to fall fighting was better than a gradual eclipse involving loss of self-respect and perhaps even degradation.

This personal quarrel was the crisis of the whole business, but the stone that started the avalanche was a matter of less importance, but of historical interest. General Jodl, the leading general of Hitler's personal staff, thought any disclosure about difficulties of German communication in Russia at that time would have a devastating effect upon public morale in Germany. He insisted on carrying on propaganda which claimed that everything was going well in the east, and he falsified the reports of German casualties and exaggerated the losses of the Russians to an unbelievable extent. The spokesman of the German High Command, General Dittmar, was a willing tool for his purpose. Thus von Brauchitsch, who by December 1941 knew that German casualties were higher than one million in dead and at least three million wounded, saw that the German public was being fed on figures that had no relation to the actual truth. He maintained that though Jodl's line might help the High Command over a short period and deceive the people at home for a few months, the recoil when the real figures became known would be all the more devastating, and the resulting deterioration of home morale more swift and serious. He therefore strongly advised that the

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people at home should be told what was going on. One may say that he was the first advocate of the gloomy line which Goebbels was forced to adopt after Stalingrad in 1942, and which he greatly intensified during the bombing of the Ruhr and the Rhineland.

The dismissal of von Brauchitsch came as a shock to the German armed forces and the German people. It had to be softened, and the German Government issued a statement in which they said that 'von Brauchitsch's farewell took a dignified and solemn form in keeping with the greatness of the moment. Although nothing is known in Berlin military circles about another appointment for Herr von Brauchitsch, these circles emphasise that Herr von Brauchitsch has neither been placed "at disposal" nor on the retired list; for in Germany, as happened with Field Marshal von Mackensen, a field marshal is never retired.'

To the German soldier and also to the German civilian one thing immediately stood out a mile, and was at the same time highly suspicious. This was the fact that the Government (for which read Hitler) referred to the former Commander-in-Chief only twenty-four hours after his dismissal as Herr von Brauchitsch, which, of course, as every German understood it, meant adding insult to injury. The official explanation went on, and though it dealt less with von Brauchitsch than with changes in the German war direction, it included the following:

'In connection with an appeal which the Führer addressed to the soldiers of the army and the SS upon concentrating the leadership of the whole armed forces and of the supreme command of the army in his own hands, it is stated in Berlin to-day (22nd December 1941) that the war is now approaching its decisive stage. It is therefore understandable that the Führer should now take over the Supreme Command of the army on which the main burden of operations will in future largely rest, in order to achieve even greater concentrations of German forces than hitherto.'

'It is recalled in military circles that the plans for the Polish campaign in all its stages, the unique Norwegian enterprise, the campaign in France and in the Balkans, the occupation of Crete, the action of General Rommel in North Africa, above all, the tremendous battles of destruction in the East, originated entirely

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from the spiritual initiative and the inspired strategy of the Führer himself, and that thus in practice he has always been leading the German Army. So the concentration of leadership of all the forces and of the supreme command of the army in his hands may merely be regarded as an elimination of a stage in the military command.'

So with a stroke of the pen the Führer claimed what had never been his work. Von Brauchitsch must have felt it all very bitterly. The actual reason for his retirement was given as ill-health, but here the usually efficient propaganda authorities in Berlin contradicted themselves on more than one occasion. According to one official source in Berlin von Brauchitsch was suffering from cardiac trouble, while the High Command issued a statement that he was suffering from inflammation of the lungs. The historical fact is that shortly after his dismissal he appeared in civilian clothes in a Vienna hotel, and enjoyed a long rest without showing any signs of ill-health whatever.

Thus it was that the Commander-in-Chief of the German forces who had waged five campaigns disappeared from the active scene. His name came back in connection with one of the most astonishing documents that have left Germany, certainly very much against the will of the Government. The *Manchester Guardian* of 6th June 1942 contained the following report:

'A British United Press correspondent on the German frontier writes that he has succeeded in obtaining a copy of the letter to Field Marshal von Brauchitsch which created a sensation in Germany when it was circulated last winter. Not only did it go to von Brauchitsch but to other members of the German High Command, and whoever was responsible for it took good care that copies should also get to a certain foreign correspondent in Berlin. It has now been smuggled out of the country. The letter, a violent attack on the Nazi administration and war planning, reads in part as follows:

Clausewitz's maxim to the effect that war is a continuation of politics by force presupposes leadership, arms, and equipment adequate to the successful pursuit of the particular objective. We have pursued this objective for several years now and our leadership does not appear to have advanced much, if at all, towards our goal.

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We have had great victories—Poland, overrun in a few days, France, Holland, Belgium, and the Balkans, but have we dealt a single disabling blow to our main enemies, the British? They fled before our victorious armies in Flanders, and were hopelessly lost at Dunkirk. A mere mopping-up operation remained, and the next thing we knew was that they were all safe in England. Where was our leadership then? Where was our Air Force?

Then, after all the discussion of the Russian problem and explanations to the people that a two-front war was impossible, our leaders decided to attack Russia although our most formidable enemy was being helped by all other nations and British confidence was growing in spite of defeat after defeat. Then our leadership debased the honour of the German Army with butchers from the SS corps.

Still the German people think we are going forward to victory. But you, General, know better. It is time for you to save the German people, without whom the world cannot live. If you do not do so everything will be destroyed. What is leading us to destruction? what is debasing our whole nation? It is Hitler and National Socialism. General, you must act now. Your oath no longer binds you, for the desperate need of the German people relieves you of it. Do your duty and give life again to Germany.'

The letter concludes with a suggestion that it was written by a high German officer. Shortly after its appearance—after its existence and the fact that it had been widely circulated became notorious in Berlin—Hitler dismissed von Brauchitsch.

## Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel

*"To shake with laughter ere the jest they hear,  
To pour at will the counterfeited tear;  
And, as their patron hints the cold or heat,  
To shake in dog-days, in December sweat."*

SAMUEL JOHNSON: LONDON, 1738

Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel cannot be ranked, either as a soldier or as a man, with those whose careers we have already described. Though second only to the Führer as Chief of the High Command, he represents nothing in relation to the German Army or to the conduct of the war; and in his character there is nothing that makes it difficult for him to accept the morals and methods of Hitler and his gang. His role as Hitler's tool suits him. His standing in the army, like that of Hitler's Gestapo in the nation, might suggest the observation of Confucius 2,500 years ago: 'When a country is at war it is stirred to its depths and the scum rises to the top'—that is, if we assume a war stealthily planned, like Germany's, for a criminal purpose, and prosecuted by means that violate every decent standard and every good instinct of mankind.

It is not to be supposed that Keitel protested to Hitler when he knew, as he must have known, that a German soldier in Poland would crush the head of a newly born child under his boots before the eyes of its Jewish mother. A man does not stand at Hitler's right hand if he is not a consistent yes-man. A Keitel succeeds more by negative than positive qualities—not so much by what is in him as by what is left out of him.

Come face to face for a moment with this war lord of Germany who hardly shows his sixty years. He sits impassively behind his desk in his office. His grey hair is adequate—you can see some of the original blond beneath it. His uniform hangs faultlessly upon his six-foot soldierly figure. As a visitor you will be received with a cold stare. The great man does nothing to break the silence. This is part of his technique, for Keitel loves to make a visitor, whether soldier or civilian, uncomfortable in his presence. The stare continues, and still the Field Marshal says nothing. He may sprawl, still not speaking, in his chair. He seems hardly aware of

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your presence, or he is indifferent. You are to be impressed, not he. You must be made to know that his thoughts are away on some higher plane.

Possibly silence<sup>8</sup> has led you to believe he is really unconscious of your presence, and your gaze has wandered to a huge motto that hangs framed in gold behind his desk.

*Wer auf Gott vertraut  
Und feste um sich haut,  
Der hat auf keinen Sand gebaut.*

Which means roughly that he who trusts in God, and in addition lays about him, is batting on a good wicket.

You forget yourself and smile; worse than that, you forget Keitel. He realises it. So you are not impressed?—the first note in the interview is a throaty roar. To lose this first round in the game of first impressions is intolerable to him, and his temper breaks before a word has been spoken.

We will change the scene: Keitel is watching manoeuvres in Gross-Born in Pomerania. War has not yet begun, but Keitel is a general; he has watched the manoeuvres all day. He has watched silently, intently, and now he asks a question.

‘I see no artillery, gentlemen. Where is the divisional artillery?’

There is an uncomfortable silence. In even tones, he repeats his question. A staff officer explains in a half whisper. There is no artillery. *This* is a reconnaissance exercise. That story is often told in Prussian army messes.

With the exception of Kleist, Keitel is possibly Hitler’s least competent general, and there will be nothing less heroic in the history of this war than the scene in the caravan at Compiègne after Hitler had put his signature to the Franco-German armistice and Keitel was left to complete details with the suppliant Marshal Pétain. ‘As soldier to soldier,’—Keitel told the octogenarian—France would not regret this agreement.

It seems hard, but it is nevertheless just, to recall that the octogenarian who was then selling France and Frenchmen into slavery was the man who would have abandoned Verdun, and who was forced by the spirit of the older France to defend it. The immortal ‘They shall not pass’, to which so many French soldiers were faithful unto death, might well have been ‘He shall not run’.



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Pétain, who in that war would have abandoned the Channel ports and the British, deserved the punishment in this one of being dictated to by a creature such as Keitel.

Wilhelm Keitel was born in 1882, the son of the owner of a small estate who farmed his own land. This was enough to separate ~~the family~~ from trade but not enough to put it in the Junker class. His insistence on social values, though common to German officers, was made more sensitive by his unpretentious origin. He was not a Prussian, but in course of time he absorbed the caste obsession and distorted it through the medium of his own underlying sense of social inferiority. Hence the endless urge to compensate, the desire to impress.

This manifestation is personal but in a larger sense it is also national. Keitel's weakness is a national failing exemplified in the Nazi myth of German racial superiority. Shortly before this war he visited Egypt, and while there he was joined by a party of British officers on a tour of some ancient tombs. For some reason there was interference by Egyptian officials. It may have been the native genius for making difficulties; there may have been good reasons; but, from whatever cause, the party was prevented from seeing certain antiquities. Keitel was furious; first with the Egyptian officials, and then with the British who immediately adapted themselves to the situation without forcing a quarrel, and possibly a little international friction. Keitel let out one of those typical but unfortunate expressions of the German. 'If you don't know how to treat these slaves,' he said, 'others will show you.'

If lack of background is one cause of Keitel's abnormal self-assertion, a prolonged lack of success is another. He joined the German army in 1901 and soon resigned himself to a monotonous existence as a subaltern; and it was soon evident to his superiors that the blond fellow was destined for a career of unrelieved mediocrity. What could the future hold for him? He had no brains to speak of among men chosen and promoted for intelligence and professional efficiency. He might, if he stayed the course, work his way up to a minor seniority after some thirty or so years. Or they would push him into the darkest corner of the eastern provinces, where sooner or later he would be axed. There is no need to make life grimmer than necessary. And so Keitel was frequently

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advised by his colonel to retire on reaching the rank of captain and seek a more profitable career as a civilian. It is charitable to hope that the colonel is long since dead.

When the 1914 war came, one might have supposed that Keitel's chance had arrived, that active service would bring promise of success; but, incredible though it may seem, he did not receive mention, decoration or promotion throughout the four years. Somehow he landed an administrative job with the Flanders Corps under the command of the infamous Admiral von Schroeder, who was known by unpleasant names to his associates and still more unpleasant ones to the Belgians. He had been called 'The Lion of Flanders' by the Kaiser, and in the mind of Wilhelm II this *nom de guerre*, when bestowed by an emperor, placed it on a level with 'The Scourge of God', 'Coeur de Lion' and others. To remain on von Schroeder's staff carried a stigma in the eyes of the majority of the German Army, and the more uncharitable of his brother officers might have described Keitel's new appointment as that of butcher's assistant.

Whatever the duties, the military knowledge gained was small. The Admiral himself was not only hated by the Belgians for his cruelty but also by his own men for his ambitious and bloody military projects. He was, for instance, a devotee of the mass frontal attack, a manoeuvre which usually succeeds only with appalling loss of life. Keitel, however, had little to do with operational work. Without receiving decoration or promotion, as we have said, he remained throughout the war on von Schroeder's staff, a performance unique in itself, since all his colleagues had escaped one by one to a more congenial atmosphere.

Keitel had one gift. He was quick to see, as Hitler grew more powerful, that advancement lay in applauding the aims of the Nazi Party and in showing his adoration of the Führer as often and as openly as possible. Among his military colleagues the competition was not great. Even von Reichenau, known to be in sympathy with the Nazis, managed to create the impression that he was no more than 'inclined to esteem certain points in the Nazi programme'. Hitler, for his part, was swift to recognise a friend, or rather a tool. Here was a soft spot in that hard core of resistance, that camp of doubtful loyalty, the Reichswehr.

The post-war years in Germany had brought the overthrow of

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ancient institutions, divided the existing social and economic structure, crushed and levelled. It was a period of every man for himself, when past successes as well as past failures were forgotten, when an idea might gain impetus overnight and the unknown adventurer flourish. Thus it was that a man like Keitel, together with a host of other undistinguished climbers, pushed his way upwards. The country had truly been stirred to its depths; the scum was rising to the top.

Despite the strong protests of von Fritsch, Hitler managed to establish his new friend as under-secretary in the Reichswehr Ministry when von Reichenau left that office to take over the command of an army corps. In some ways Keitel became the first Quisling spying for his master within the Ministry and thereby sparing Hitler anxiety from a quarter where there might have been much to fear. To Keitel, in fact, goes the credit for the final domination of the Reichswehr by the Nazi Party. When von Fritsch was forced to retire in 1938 Hitler rewarded Keitel with the appointment of Military Secretary of State in the War Ministry under himself as Supreme Commander and von Brauchitsch as Commander-in-Chief. And to-day an ignorant soldier holds nominal sway over a man like von Rundstedt.

Keitel gradually became known to the outside world by his repeated presence at the many conferences between Hitler and Mussolini. Speeding towards the Brenner in his bullet proof train, the Führer was accompanied by his show general. Tall, fair and dandified, this immaculate creature was also a good pianist. We have seen his counterpart in many a film: the heel-clicking, suave exquisite who easily becomes grim and sinister when occasion offers, but softens in the hour of relaxation while his hands caress the keys in splendid Wagnerian chords. Among his own countrymen Keitel enjoys the soubriquet of the comic-strip general.

As a show-piece, however, Hitler found him useful, though it is probable that during important conferences he has learnt to know his place. In his master's absence he once attempted to bully Mussolini. This was in 1938, over a matter of the use of the port of Trieste by Austria. In those days the 'bullfrog of the Pontine marshes' was in the full tide of his inflation, and was capable of giving as good as he got, and he gave back enough to arouse Keitel to vindictive revenge. He advised Hitler not to

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kiss Queen Helena's hand when introduced to her, and so it came about that the Führer, his ministers and generals, bowed deeply on introduction to the Queen but otherwise ignored the royal hand. Only Goebbels failed to play the game, and afterwards excused himself by saying he had not heard the general's request.

As we have seen, it was in the Forest of Compiègne in the late summer of 1940 that Keitel had his finest hour. Here in the railway coach that twenty-two years before had seen the climax of Germany's humility, Keitel read out Hitler's terms to the conquered French nation. The big man with the little soul at last came into his own.

It is said that there may be merit without eminence; but there is no eminence without some merit. What gift in particular besides showmanship, what speciality among a crowd of military specialists does Keitel possess? How can he hope to compete with such experts as Guderian? At the top of the German Army one must necessarily be expert at something. If you were to ask the Field Marshal himself, he would answer with two words. His special subject is North Africa. Had he not shortly before the war spent nearly three months on the African continent, finding time to visit Egypt, insult his hosts, and inspect some of the archaeological features of the country? He visited the Sudan and as a glorified tourist trod the sands of Libya. We do not know what further knowledge he acquired in those greenhouses where the Fatherland is said to harden her sons for the rigours of desert warfare.

It is not surprising if Keitel is a difficult, and at times almost impossible, man to work with. There are moments when he will listen to no one, when he will not even answer but merely stare at the questioner with a fixed gaze. On such occasions he is doubtless wrapped in communion with the Absolute—he has made a special study of imitating the Führer. Strangely enough he does not care for social functions, preferring outdoor occupations such as walking and riding, though he is a bad horseman. He first discovered his preference for this sort of exercise on hearing that the Führer liked men of the open air.

He lacks humour even for a German, declaring that a signed portrait of Hitler is his most precious possession. In October 1938 he took personal charge of the new map of Czechoslovakia, bringing it from Munich to Berlin and indicating proudly that he

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bore 'his Führer's concrete evidence of a bloodless victory'. And it is reported that during the Polish campaign, after the early successes of the Reichswehr, he returned to headquarters in company with his master. A special compartment had been prepared in the train, and during the journey the two men disappeared into this sanctum, where for an hour and a half they indulged in an ~~orgy of~~ heroic Wagnerian music.

In July 1941 his youngest son Hans, a lieutenant in the Reichswehr, was killed on the eastern front; and Keitel, at least in public, was emotionally unmoved. It was unGermanic, he said, to mourn a son who had attained the supreme honour of losing his life in battle. In contrast, when his elder son was wounded and convalescing in Italy, the young man was perpetually followed by affectionate parental telegrams.

What is the attitude of Germany's real soldiers towards this man? There are generals who treat him to his face with scant respect, and von Rundstedt has described his activities in the Reichswehr Ministry as 'a chain of monkey tricks'. There is little doubt that but for his close friendship with Himmler and von Ribbentrop he would long ago have been replaced by an abler man. His case has even engaged the attention of the higher army medical authorities. While von Brauchitsch was his superior the question of Keitel's mental balance came to a head, and the medical authorities proposed to submit documents to prove his instability.

The career of Keitel is an object lesson to us, and at the same time a possible source of comfort. The democracies do not hold a monopoly for stupidity in high places. In the wake of Hitler's successes we are now beginning to see the shadows of relentlessly pursuing blunders. It may well be that among these history will point a silent finger at the name of Wilhelm Keitel.

# Field Marshal Fedor von Bock

*The blood of the soldier makes the glory of the General.*

H. C. BOHN; HANDBOOK OF PROVERBS

**O**f medium-height, thin but wiry, the general is still very active at 63 years of age. His piercing grey eyes in a severely lined face look uncompromisingly through you, softened by no pretence of pleasantness. He is content to appear what he is, a disciplinarian, but his cold detachment would be more seemly in a hangman. Speaking with the nasal accent generally acquired by the Prussian Guards officer, he always behaves in accordance with the conventions of his type, movements jerky, gestures abrupt; and his conversation, even with civilians, is carried on with the staccato of dictated field orders. He will ask for extreme privation from his men, but he will share it. His orders become law the moment they are issued, and they are unchangeable, even for himself.

Despising the 'softening influences of culture and civilisation', as he calls them, von Bock should have been born during the time when Prussia alone counted in Germany. There was no response from him to the National Socialist Government's efforts to break down barriers of local tradition and custom between the originally very distinct states and districts of Germany. For him Prussian conduct and mannerisms are superior and Prussia's own, not to be imitated by the less fortunate. The supremacy of Prussia and Prussianism is a deep conviction religiously held by him, and if he is aware of other spheres of life than that of the army, or of other human beings than those in uniform, he gives them no consideration.

The 'death and glory' theory is no mere propagandist device in the mind of von Bock. He is among those who, by that cult of death, have made Germany for generations the Ishmaelite among nations and turned her hand against others; men who have too successfully opposed the spread of liberal thought towards peace and a more abundant life.

Hardened by training, strengthened by a fanatical belief in his professional life, he can fast for many hours and then be indifferent to what he eats and drinks. A man pays for the one-

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sided development of his temperament. Von Bock has admitted that the only form of entertainment to which he can respond is the music of brass bands. Nor is any inclination to fellowship conspicuous in his make-up.

His word is not as true as his sword, for mental agility and duplicity are his weapons, suited indeed to the methods of ~~Prussian~~ governments. An English Liberal journal, rebuking Lord Roberts for his warnings in 1913, once asked when Prussia had broken her pledged word. The example of von Bock, as that of Prussia before and since 1914, makes a mockery of such misplaced idealism, for the purpose of the German Army has never been thwarted or deflected by past promises and assurances, and the Versailles Treaty never was allowed to impede rearmament under Hitler.

Von Bock willingly sacrifices personal comfort for military efficiency, but never his own prestige for the sake of giving due credit to others. Aware of his own limitations he will listen to advice from his staff and act upon it, but without any gesture of acknowledgment. His career tells us as much of Germany's military failures as of her successes, and helps us to appraise her moral littleness.

Fedor von Bock was born on 4th December 1880 in the small out-of-date fortress of Küstrin. He was a son of the Prussian general Moritz von Bock. We shall not understand von Bock without a close acquaintance with his childhood, where may be found the key to his ideas and characteristics that have puzzled not only the German Army but his own friends.

The old fortress of Küstrin on the river Oder, east of Berlin, was full of memorials of Prussia's early fighting history, but had lost its military importance long before young Fedor began to observe the world about him. The eastern side of the Reich was then protected by the strong fortress belt of Thorn-Graudenz-Danzig on the banks of the river Vistula. Küstrin was not even a second-class fortress, but it supported a small garrison which was quartered in shelters and barracks that dated from the times of Frederick II, 130 years back, and the whole town bore witness to the period known inside Prussia as 'Frederician'. It was here that young Frederick had been taught the tragic lesson that

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changed his life, and nothing was more deeply ingrained in the thought and feeling of Fedor. Frederick, as Crown Prince, leaned towards art and literature, and therefore towards France as the fount of European culture. The strong and well-trained army which his father had created at the expense of the welfare of Prussia was not even a recreation for him, still less a serious interest. So foreign to his nature were the military enthusiasms of his father, the 'soldier king', that he had made plans to escape to England, marry an English princess, and leave the spiritually barren Court of Berlin. He was to be helped by two young officer friends, Katte and Keith.

Captured in escaping from Prussia, he and his friends were imprisoned in the fortress of Küstrin. Katte was executed in the fortress yard before the Prince's eyes. 'To teach his son a lesson,' Frederick William I ordered that he should be made to stand with his head against the window of his cell overlooking the courtyard, with his eyes open to see his friend die for a fault that was primarily his own. This was Prussian discipline.

Küstrin thus stood in the minds of certain classes in Prussia as a symbol for discipline stern and ruthless, overriding all human and family ties. It represented the cornerstone of that conception of life which made Prussia. Thus, in the years between 1880 and 1895 the son of a Prussian general in his most impressionable years was imbibing these lessons of a past history which were to soak into the very tissues of his mind, and the hours which young Fedor von Bock spent on the banks of the old fortress moat left an indelible mark upon him.

With this background he joined the famous cadet schools of Potsdam and Gross-Lichterfelde near Berlin. His ingrained Prussianism was apparent even among these young cadets bred in the tradition of Brandenburg-Prussian history, readily receptive to discipline in thought and action. He was a conspicuous fanatic who even denied himself healthy relaxation and the boyish jokes and games that have a place even in Prussia's military schools. Every day, every hour not filled by some study of military science, by drill or other special aspect of an officer's education, was wasted for him, and he talked openly and much to his friends about his way of life. He tried, even while a cadet, to improve the methods of his teachers and of his commanding officer. No



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severity of regimentation could satisfy him.

In all this he showed a temperament more earnest and purposeful than was at all common among the sons of the Prussian upper class, where, indeed, stolidity and even lethargy are frequent, if not general. He liked to impress his colleagues with his piercing eyes, abrupt gestures and a general sense of urgency, and they, aware of his historical background, nicknamed him 'The Holy Fire of Küstrin'. Yet while making fun of his excess of Prussian zeal they respected him as a sincere devotee: he was one of them, separated only by greater gifts and a deeper sense of dedication.

His devotion to Prussianism was more marked in him than his intellectual power, and the highest scholastic attainments were beyond him. Of this he was fully conscious, and strove to make up by industry and diligence what he lacked in intellect. More than once he remained in Berlin during the holidays in order to complete his studies, a sacrifice more remarkable in a cadet than in a fully commissioned officer. But to his comrades this seemed like stealing a march, and he was dubbed a place-hunter, a reputation that stuck to him in his later and more responsible career.

In 1898 he joined the 5th Regiment of Prussian Foot Guards, one of the crack infantry formations of old Imperial Germany. In this regiment there were two definite classes, the young sub-alterns up to and including captains, and the hardened, experienced field officers whose ambitions more often centred around the court in Berlin and Potsdam than in their military duties. These seniors were apt to frown on youthful eagerness. As a go-getter von Bock was not popular, but he won some of the early rewards he sought. When a second lieutenant he was appointed battalion A.D.C. in 1904. Two years later, still a second lieutenant, he became regimental A.D.C., and in 1908 a first lieutenant.

The regimental A.D.C. to a Guards Regiment is a conspicuous position, and he was now in contact with circles in Berlin that could add favour to merit. The Court, the Government, political leaders of the Right, and the many cliques and associations that formed the background of the ruling class in Prussian Berlin took notice of young officers in prominent positions in the crack

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Guards. If von Bock had wanted such a career as can be founded less on professional claims than on personal influence in administrative-civilian quarters he could have had it. But his aim was higher.

He had set his mind, as he had confessed to friends in earlier days, on joining the General Staff whatever the cost. But during these years he learned, without receiving a formal rebuff, that he was not wanted. Efficiency and industry were not enough to get a young subaltern admitted to the General Staff. Natural gifts were needed that could never be obtained by work. The firebrand von Bock, known for his flamboyant speeches in the officers' mess of the 5th Guards, was not exactly the type that was sought by the General Staff, and it was equally impossible to have a man in that select corps who in the past had relied largely on crammers and other aids to push himself into the limelight. He was given to understand that the selection department for the General Staff required more discretion in their candidates; and he was quick to adapt himself. Less was now heard in the officers' mess of his slogan that 'a soldier's profession should always be crowned by a heroic death in battle, sealing his definite mission for Emperor and Fatherland with the supreme sacrifice'. His self-appointed mission to 'educate spiritually' the officers in the 5th was abandoned.

During subsequent Imperial manoeuvres he concentrated solely on the practical side of his job, and at last in 1910 was transferred to the General Staff, though at first only in a temporary capacity, and by 1912, with the rank of captain, he had established himself firmly. Witty brother officers in the red-brick building on the Königsplatz in Berlin remembered too well his past declarations, he was still branded as 'The Fanatical Dier', and, though less vocal, he was never to lose the nickname. Indeed, when war was declared in August 1914 and the casualties piled higher every day, his passion for death in the field broke out again. To be killed by an enemy bullet, he would say, was a thing to be truly grateful for, and he went about improving the occasion, hurrying the German soldier to his happy doom.

It is known that if the General Staff had had the men to replace him, von Bock would have been ordered to the front during the autumn of 1914, when the German Army lost a high percentage of

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its officers in the field. Through this lack of officers alone, perhaps, he was able to hold his position on the General Staff up to 1916, when he took over a battalion of the 4th Prussian Foot Guards. It was in this command that he was decorated with the Order *Pour le Mérite*, though it is not known exactly why he received it. The official citation does not refer to his bravery with the almost formal adjective 'conspicuous', but describes it as 'incredible', a word unique in the official German military language of that time.

The rhetorical fire-eater withstood the test of the actual flames, which does not always happen. Von Bock has been justly credited with cool nerves as well as with a complete disregard for his own life, but these attributes were not enhanced by the equal disregard he had for the lives of the officers and men under his command. Major von Bock, as he was by then, is well remembered in the annals of the Prussian Guards for his ruthless exposure of his troops as well as of himself. Men who served under him remember him standing on the first step leading out of a trench a few seconds before zero hour, calmly smoking a cigarette, flicking his hand-made riding boots with a whip, refusing a tin hat, and 'going over the top' promptly and without any sign of excitement.

But if not death, then glory. Von Bock knew that there was no future for an ambitious field officer in trench warfare, and though the way back to the General Staff in Berlin was barred he managed to get himself attached as First General Staff Officer to the 200th Infantry Division. This was a reserve division, in personnel not exactly up to the standard of the Guards; and von Bock did not feel at home. As a lecturing, hectoring regular, he was intensely disliked by the officers of the divisional staff, many of them from southern Germany, and though von Bock's position in the division was unassailable because of his office, he suffered something like social ostracism. It could not be otherwise with his acute sense of superiority, and in his confidential reports to friends in Berlin he referred to his brother officers as 'these part-time soldiers of Bavaria and Württemberg, with whom I have now to associate myself'. The most docile German does not like being despised, even by other Germans.

An appointment to the staff of the Army Group under the

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command of the Imperial Crown Prince, therefore, came as a great relief to him. Relations between the Crown Prince and Major von Bock were most cordial. Indeed Major von Bock and the Army Group Commander, heir to His Imperial Majesty, exchanged the familiar '*Du*' instead of the more formal '*Sie*' when addressing each other. Under the Chief of Staff of this Army Group, Count Frederick von der Schulenburg, von Bock held the position of General Staff Officer 1A.

The Army Group '*Kronprinz*' had made a high reputation for itself. Consisting of the best Regular Army formations and subsequently strengthened by the best reserve reinforcements, it was undoubtedly the strongest of the larger strategical units in the entire German Army. In return for the strength given to it, much was expected; hence its excessive casualties, which were sometimes twenty to thirty per cent higher than in other army groups. The younger subalterns and the N.C.O.s and men did not speak kindly of their Imperial Group Commander and his staff, and were convinced that they were led by reckless and unskilled officers. Feeling ran high in that group, and only the strictest discipline prevented it from breaking asunder during the years of 1917-18.

Military history, however, corrects this verdict and shows that the tasks allotted to the group were such that no skill in the command could have avoided heavy losses.

For good or ill, the army group leader and his staff lived apart, even more remote mentally than physically from the critics under their command; they knew nothing of the criticism. What was more serious, just as this complacent command ignored the world below it, so it was ignored from above.

When news of the pending armistice reached the staff of the Army Group '*Kronprinz*', the Crown Prince Wilhelm, his Chief of Staff and his General Staff Officers, it was a shock for which they were completely unprepared. They were incredulous. So extreme was von Bock's egotism that he reported the same evening to the Crown Prince that he had been insulted in the open street by a private soldier, and in much the same state of mind he left his post in an effort to prevent the Kaiser's abdication. When later, in the headquarters of the High Command of the Imperial German armed forces, Field Marshal von Hindenburg and Generals Ludendorff, Groener and Heye had persuaded the

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Kaiser as Supreme Commander to abdicate and to escape to Holland, Major von Bock reported to his Chief of Staff, General Graf von der Schulenburg, and informed him that he, the General and the Crown Prince, had been urgently asked to report to the High Command in Spa in order to attempt to persuade the Kaiser, to resist. Von Bock managed to create the impression that this ~~order had~~ come from von Hindenburg and his generals as a last minute effort to bring the Kaiser back to his senses, as von Bock put it. As is known, this was a complete distortion of the truth.

The Crown Prince Wilhelm writes in his memoirs\*:

‘During the night of the 8–9th November General Count von der Schulenberg was ordered by telephone by Major von Stülpnagel to Spa for the 9th November. Major von Bock received this order. Reasons why Count von der Schulenberg ought to go and who wanted to talk to him were not given.’

As soon as this telephone order was handed to the Chief of Staff, the Crown Prince and Count von der Schulenberg hurried to Spa, where they arrived on 9th November, to the surprise of Hindenburg and his staff. The Crown Prince immediately tried to persuade his father to resist the abdication plan and to lead back part of the retreating army, which was still loyal to him. Von Hindenburg was not long in getting rid of the Crown Prince, and events took their well-known course.

It is with von Bock’s little effort that we are concerned. His views are now known. He thought that if the German Army was forced to admit that it had lost the war against the Allies, it could at least attempt to win a second war—a civil war inside Germany. He thought at that time that it would have been easy to come to terms with the Allies through their fear of Communist and Socialist disorder in Germany. Von Bock was an early trader in the Bolshevik ‘bogey’.

There had never been a telephone call from the High Command, and the presence of the Crown Prince was not only not wanted but highly disturbing. Because von Bock was a diehard in a lost cause as well as a professional die-hard in the army, he went on looking for some way out when those who knew best had recognised that Germany was defeated; and it was like him to

\**Erinnerungen des Kronprinzen Wilhelm*. Rotta’sche Buchhandlung, Stuttgart and Berlin. 1923, p. 294.

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give no thought to the people at home or the men under his command. If the predominance of his caste and the existence of the old order could have been secured by civil war, he would have trained his guns on any town in revolt without counting the cost in human suffering.

His self-appointed mission to Spa had no sanction in any code of discipline, but it was a new revelation of von Bock ~~himself~~. His brother officers read in it personal ambition alone, and thought it gave a new and merely personal meaning to his highfalutin' death-or-glory patriotic speeches. They went as far as to say that von Bock was little concerned even about the Imperial regime in November 1918, its maintenance and its survival, but that he saw himself as the saviour of an existing order, a part that would bring him into the limelight. He adapted himself so adroitly to the new turn of events, however, that only a year later, in 1919, he was again in an official position, employed as an active officer at the Army Peace Commission, which dealt with the question of general demobilisation and the re-establishment of nucleus formations for a new army of the Republic of Weimar—the Reichswehr. Thus he stood by the cradle of the new army that was to develop so formidably twenty years later.

To an outside world this army commission dealt mainly with demobilisation and the breaking-up of the framework of the old Imperial Army. The commission liked to compare itself with the receiver in bankruptcy. There was, however, another side to its activities, and in this Major von Bock played a large part. It was understood that the army of 100,000 men permitted by the Treaty of Versailles would receive the immediate attention of this commission, yet von Bock contrived to set in operation a method of illegal recruitment that was designed to raise the strength of the army beyond the prescribed 100,000.

This was known as '*Krümpformation*', an expression borrowed from the time when Prussia was trying to raise a new army against Napoleon after the defeats of Jena and Auerstadt in 1806 and 1807. It implied that with a limited army a mass of recruits would pass through for short service. The Treaty of Versailles had provided that the professional soldiers of the 100,000 army would have to serve twelve years, officers for 24 years. When the flagrant breach of the treaty became too obvious it was von Bock

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who worked on the establishment of full military formations that did not appear official at all but were nevertheless at times stronger than the regular Reichswehr.

All this was distinct from the many so-called free corps which were now springing up in Germany like mushrooms, promoted either by the Government or some right-wing Nationalist group.

~~On the~~ completion of this move, which was fundamental in Germany's secret rearmament programme, von Bock was appointed Chief of Staff of the 3rd Military District (Berlin) in 1920, and held the position until 1923. In this capacity he looked after the illegal Reichswehr formations east of Berlin, where the chief recruiting districts of the main garrison establishment were. At first he camouflaged so successfully the existence of these formations that they escaped the attention of the Inter-Allied Commission of Military Control. With arms and munitions he was less successful. In November 1921 an enormous quantity of artillery and other machinery that should have been destroyed long before was discovered at the Rockstroh Works at Heidenau in Saxony. The Treaty of Versailles allowed the German Army 84 guns, that is, 21 batteries of 10.5 howitzers. In Heidenau alone, 600 howitzers were now discovered, besides 342 breech blocks and other components of howitzers. Beneath the flooring of the works, hidden in good condition, were five rifling machines, important for the construction of guns. These machines could not easily be replaced.

Again, at the Spandau Arsenal near Berlin there were documents secretly stored in two rooms piled up to the ceiling, and in them the Berlin military district retained the names of artillery engineers and specialists for further service. When the existence of these papers was reported to the Inter-Allied Control Commission, they opened an investigation and asked the German Government to put armed guards in front of the two rooms. When the Commission arrived the rooms were empty. The sentry on guard was sentenced to six days confinement in barracks, but two months later he was promoted sergeant-major by the Chief of Staff of the 3rd Military District, Lieut.-Colonel von Bock.

In January 1922 the Inter-Allied Commission of Military Control announced that, despite the Heidenau incident, 120

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officers and 230 men would leave the commission, whose Dresden centre would thus completely disappear. A report published by the commission on disarmament in Bavaria showed that the so-called Citizens' Force had handed some of their rifles over, but the majority had smuggled them to Austria, especially to the Tyrol, where they were kept for the happy day when the Allied Control people should have left Bavaria, and they could be handed back to their original Bavarian owners.

The decrease in strength of the Inter-Allied Commission was a great relief to the Chief of Staff of the 3rd Military District, von Bock, because from the beginning it had effectively curtailed his illegal reserves of war material. According to the report (May 1923) of Lieut.-Colonel Guinness, then Under-Secretary of State for War in the British Government, the German Government had voluntarily surrendered to the Commission :

- 33,550 guns (with barrels)
- 38,107,604 shells
- 11,616 trench mortars
- 87,950 machine-guns
- 4,560,861 small arms
- 459,903,800 rifle ammunition

Material destroyed before the Allied Control Commission was established, according to this report, amounted to :

- 8,618 guns
- 6,220,311 shells
- 2,635 trench mortars
- 6,004 machine-guns
- 580,395 small arms
- 31,960,000 rifle ammunition.

This material was said to have been destroyed under the supervision of the German authorities, and for that reason the figures are open to question.

The Allied Control Commission discovered the following material and had it destroyed :

- 63 guns complete
- 7 trench mortars
- 840 machine-guns
- 43,380 small arms
- 6,927,496 rifle ammunition



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In a reply to Sir William Davison (M.P. for South Kensington), Lieut.-Colonel Guinness said that there were at that time 150,000 police in Germany, armed to the extent of one rifle to three men, one revolver per man, and 340 machine-guns and 150 armoured cars for the entire force.

In camouflaging the number of personnel and the budget authorising the pay of these men von Bock at first seemed to be more successful. His chief henchman was a certain retired Major Buchrucker. The general public first learned of the existence of these illegal formations—which were officially termed Labour Companies—in 1923, when Major Buchrucker thought that the time had come to assert their right of existence. He staged a sort of putsch, which had for its object the seizure of the fortress of Küstrin, von Bock's birthplace. The coup failed. The Reichswehr tried by every means to hush up the incident, because publicity would tend to tear aside the veil of legality which the Government and its Reichswehr Ministry tried to preserve in its relations with the Allies and other foreign governments.

For four years von Bock successfully held his position as Chief of Staff and carried on his clandestine activities. In 1924 the Reichswehr Ministry thought it wise to replace him and to put him in charge of the Second Battalion of the Infantry Regiment No. 4 at Kolberg in Pomerania. The Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, Colonel General Hans von Seeckt, did not like having officers in highly responsible positions who had made the mistake of allowing the public to know anything about the illegal activities of the regular armed forces of the Republic. But exposure was to come.

While the Reichswehr authorities had managed only too well to keep the existence of the formations hidden from the eyes of the Allies, they had acted with little foresight in their treatment of some of the volunteers serving in the Black Reichswehr. From the year 1926 a whole series of legal actions brought by aggrieved men against the Reichswehr Ministry disclosed the treacherous activities of von Bock and his friends.

On 31st January 1926 the so-called Feme murder trials started. Feme was the organisation employed to purge the Black Reichswehr of volunteers who showed a disposition to inform the Inter-Allied Commission of the existence of their battalions, or to

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complain of them to left wing party politicians, who might at any time use the information to embarrass the Republican Government. The Feme was composed of several officers, N.C.O.s and men who during the years 1920-23 had staged 'courts-martial', under whose verdicts they killed a number of people. The head of the German Government, Reichskanzler Dr. Stresemann, a Democrat, and Reichswehr Minister Dr. Gessler, also a Democrat, feared that an open trial of these militarist criminals would excite the suspicious attention of the Treaty powers.

A case was opened against officers of the 'Regiment von Senden', namely Baron von Senden himself, Captain Gutknecht, Aschenkamp, Stein, Schirrmann, and another officer, Lieutenant Benn, who were accused of having murdered private soldier Panier. After two days' hearing of the charges Baron von Senden and Captain Gutknecht were acquitted, and Aschenkamp, Stein, Schirrmann and Benn were condemned to death, the latter as an accessory. During these trials the Reichswehr authorities insisted that the murdered private soldier Panier should be referred to in official records as the 'Baker Panier', his former occupation, thus trying to give the whole matter a civilian colour. None of the sentences was ever executed.

In November 1926 another case started, against the illegal garrison of the Fortress of Küstrin, where von Bock's personal friend Buchrucker had been in command. The Reichswehr authorities attempted to deny responsibility or even knowledge of the case, but their efforts were not perfectly co-ordinated and 'indiscretions' committed by the Minister of the Reichswehr himself helped to give the game away.

Here are some highlights of the exposure :

Lieutenant Janke, a member of Buchrucker's force, believed he had been poisoned because it had been discovered by Buchrucker that he had sold a certain amount of rifle ammunition to left-wing party formations. Lieutenant Buchholtz and the N.C.O.s Thom and Rathmann were accused. Colonel Gudovius, who commanded the Küstrin district in 1923, was called on to give evidence. The court tried to force him to disclose full evidence on the subject of the existence of these illegal formations in his district, but the Colonel successfully asserted his right to refuse to answer on the ground that State security was involved.

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At one point Lieutenant Buchholtz tried his utmost to establish the legal character of the formation in which he was serving, affirming that he was acting under the orders of his superior officers. Here is the verbatim record:

Lieutenant Buchholtz: 'When I enlisted I asked whether the Black Reichswehr was connected with the official army. It was admitted that it was, and I enlisted.'

Colonel Gudovious at once rose and said: 'The statement of the accused that the Black Reichswehr was connected with the regular army is a danger to the security of the State, and may have the worst possible effect upon relations with foreign countries.'

Buchholtz himself further disclosed that high officers of the Reichswehr, among them von Bock, had given him and his colleagues instructions how to act in emergency: they were directed to march against Poland. Finally Thom and Rathman were sentenced to two years' imprisonment and Lieutenant Buchholtz to one month.

The chief responsibility for all these illegalities rested upon the shoulders of von Bock and Major Buchrucker. Von Bock had taken special leave, and was anxiously awaiting the result of the trials.

The next case was against Sergeant-Major Klapproth, for the attempted murder of Corporal Ghaedicke. Lieutenant Schultz was accused of instigation, Lieutenant Heines of complicity. This time Major Buchrucker could not keep out of court, but von Bock managed to appear only as a witness for the Reichswehr. During the proceedings Buchrucker, in an effort to clear himself, asserted that the Minister of the Reichswehr, Herr Gessler, had made a statement in the presence of Buchrucker's solicitor in which he had said:

'Major Buchrucker had destroyed the carefully and laboriously built up system of defence in the east of Germany, and had caused the Fatherland incalculable damage which could not be repaired.'

This evidence appeared in documentary form. Buchrucker managed to drag into the court von Bock who, as 'an expert for the army', made the following statement:

'The men (Buchrucker and his Black Reichswehr formation) felt that they were soldiers.'

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During the hearing it came out in Lieutenant Heines' recorded statement about conditions at Fort Tchernow that the fortress had been frequently visited by officers of the Inter-Allied Commission, and that on such occasions all the billets of the Black Reichswehr 'had to be cleared of the last straw within twenty minutes'.

In the end Sergeant-Major Klapproth was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, while all the officers were acquitted. But the cases had to be re-opened in February 1928, when Schultz and Klapproth were given 15 years' imprisonment each and Major Buchrucker one year.

Another case was that against the ill-famed Lieutenant Heines (later famous for his activities as Police President of Breslau and Storm Trooper General after Hitler had taken over) and Lieutenant Rossbach and five others who were accused of murdering one of their comrades, Willie Schmidt, who had tried to warn officers of the Inter-Allied Commission of the existence of these formations. The question was raised whether the army recognised the Rossbach Brigade as part of its organisation. The witnesses for the regular Reichswehr, Colonel Kaldrack, Lieut.-Colonel von Schleicher (who became head of the Government in 1932 and was one of the most influential personalities in the Reichswehr Ministry and in the Government) and von Bock stated in evidence that the Reichswehr had nothing whatever to do with illegal formations. While this evidence was being given one of the accused, Baron von Bodungen, had a heated argument with the Reichswehr witnesses which severely exposed Kaldrack, von Schleicher and von Bock. Here is a passage from the court records:

**BARON VON BODUNGEN:** 'Herr Judge, I should like to explain why Colonel Kaldrack's memory is so bad. I had a talk with him in the corridor last Friday, and he said to me: "Yes, we do consider the men of the Rossbach Brigade to be soldiers, but I cannot say that in court".'

**COLONEL KALDRACK** (jumping to his feet, his face red with anger): 'Oh! Oh! Oh! Bodungen!'

**BARON VON BODUNGEN:** 'Ask Lieutenant Schultz, who was with me.'

**THE JUDGE:** 'Well, Herr Lieutenant?'

Lieutenant Schultz stood up calmly and declared that Baron

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von Bodungen was right. The Colonel now went purple, and shouted hysterically:

'I have been in the army thirty-four years. Everybody must admit that I have always done my duty. I have taken an oath. Is this done to get me in a corner? No officer fights like this!'

During this scene von Bock sat with beads of perspiration running down his face. He knew that Colonel Kaldrack's military career would now come to an end, and if any such accusing questions should be put to him his own career would also be cut short. Yet von Bock, who as chief of staff to the 3rd Military District was the chief instigator of the circumstances leading to the trial, escaped without blame.

In July 1929 a number of these irregular officers were released by a sympathetic Mecklenburg Government. Even the Prussian Government State in Berlin was positively lenient with them. These men had been shown to be the murderers of their own comrades, yet they were able to go at once to Berlin, where in the same year, in the great Sports-Palace, five thousand Berliners welcomed them as 'patriot heroes'. One after another they appeared on the stage and were received with applause and hurrahs. Public attention at home and abroad had been excited by these national and international scandals, but the public sentiment of Germany as a whole was with the criminals. How otherwise could von Bock have had the audacity to sue in court a number of pacifist writers, among them the well-known Karl von Ossietzky, who was later tortured to death in a concentration camp? In the case against these writers von Bock gave evidence, and when asked whether he had taken part, or intended to take part, in any of the putsches and rebellions of the year 1923 he answered with an expression of evasive arrogance: 'But why? The whole thing was completely hopeless.'

Von Bock thus contrived not only to remain in the regular army, but to be promoted to full colonel of the 4th Infantry Regiment in Kolberg, and in February 1929 he became Major General and Commander of the crack First Cavalry Division in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder. He was even able to add to his laurels the halo of a martyr who had been dragged into court for the patriotism he had shown during the early years of the Reichswehr.

These facts, incredible to those who even now believe it feasible

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to separate the German nation and its history from Hitler and the Nazis, are incontestable; and they are vital to an understanding of post-war Germany. For it is just because these things were not believed to be possible by those who were the dominant figures at the Peace Conference of 1919 and influenced the loose application of the Treaty of Versailles, that a second World War was unsuspectingly prepared.

Many higher Reichswehr officers lost their rank and position during these trials. Von Bock's ingenuity alone enabled him to survive. The only way in which any court in Germany could get hold of the regular army officers in connection with this unsavoury business was by calling on them to give authoritative or expert evidence. In any other country each one of these officers, von Bock perhaps more than any, would have been convicted as accessories and dismissed the service. The court proceedings prove that von Bock and many others, but von Bock especially, thought lightly of the oath of allegiance and loyalty that they had sworn on the constitution of the Weimar Republic. In every case it was made clear that von Bock, as one of the chief instigators of crimes of violence and international fraud, farcically dealt with by the law courts of the German Republic, was a confirmed perjurer, and had secret support at the back of him.

In Germany the conventional standards of rectitude and justice have always been adaptable to the needs and desires of the army caste. The criminal code contained many a clause under which von Bock could have been convicted. That none were invoked against him means that men higher than he in the army and the State countenanced what he did, if they did not direct it. The Weimar Republic was hardly less under the influence of the militarists than were its predecessors.

During that time the man known to the world as Adolf Hitler was nothing but a small, unsuccessful politician, who still had to reinstate himself after a light prison sentence for high treason, but already, as he has said, contemptuously noting his triumph over authorities who lacked the courage to hang him. Germany was officially governed by Democrats and Social Democrats. Unofficially the strings were effectively pulled by the army.

In 1930 Major Buckrucker wrote a book called *In Seeckt's Shadow*, in which he disclosed that he had a formal pact with

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von Bock, Chief of Staff of the 3rd Military District in Berlin. Evidence against von Bock was piled high in this book, but the law-courts and the public conveniently ignored it.

We now return to von Bock's military career. Hardened in political conflicts, experienced as a General Staff officer, he concentrated during subsequent years on his appointment as battalion commander and later as regimental chief of the 4th Regimental Infantry in Kolberg. The disciplinary standards of the regular Reichswehr were high as they were severe. Its manpower and material were of the first order, the officers knew their job, yet von Bock managed to excel. The 4th Infantry Regiment has never forgotten his command. To reach a level of training above that of other regiments von Bock, up to and including 1929 employed methods that can be paralleled only by those elaborated later by the Gestapo. He donned civilian clothes and hid in forests and fields to inspect, in the disguise of a casual onlooker, the training of his company and battalion commanders.

The requirements of the regulations during manoeuvres were not only enforced to the letter but very often exceeded. His troops made route marches with their tin hats on, with their arms shouldered, and with every added exertion that a strict disciplinarian can impose. The number of suicides in his regiment mounted. All received a baptism of von Bock's special '*Weltanschauung*'. Day after day, week after week, officers and men were lectured on their privilege of belonging to the armed forces of the Republic at a time when many more young Germans, eager to volunteer, were denied such membership because of the restrictions on armaments. It was as though he sought to justify the extraordinary exertions demanded from his men.

The effect upon his subordinates varied. At first the majority of the officers laughed at him, then became sullenly if silently discontented; but a small minority believed in what he said, and strove to imitate him. The faithful ones were nicknamed, inside the Reichswehr, 'Bock's own death boys.' The slogan was borrowed from a soldiers' song with the refrain: 'No finer death than to be slain and shot as a soldier in front of the enemy.'

The Reichswehr Ministry took note of this strict military commander and drew two favourable conclusions. The first was that after the stringent lesson of the Feme murder cases von Bock

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was a reformed character and would never dabble in internal or external politics again; the second was that he would obey orders strictly as he expected his own to be obeyed by his subordinates. His reward was a transfer from the 4th Infantry, in the command of which the former Guardsman had felt himself degraded. In Germany such a regiment does not carry any of the traditions of wealth and social prestige under which a crack Guards or cavalry unit of the old Imperial Army lorded it over all, even other German officers and soldiers. He was given command of the 1st Cavalry Division, where again he felt he was in surroundings appropriate to his standing. Then in 1931 he took over the 2nd Military District in Stettin with the rank of Lieut.-General, a position which he held till 1935, and which ultimately gave him the rank of Commanding General.

It was in the capital of Pomerania that von Bock spent those tense months which preceded and immediately followed the advent of Hitler as head of the State. In this conservative Junker circle, remote in feeling from Berlin, the Commanding General could count on the willing acceptance of his authority and his views, both outside the the army as well as within it. In all this, Berlin, though only eighty miles from his headquarters, left him alone. He was well aware of the struggle for power going on below the surface between the Reichswehr and the Nazi Party. He had no part in it; his side was going to be the winning one. If the Nazi Party could bring an enlarged army into being, which would mean more power for himself, they were his men and their Commander-in-Chief was his. On the other hand Hitler and the political leaders saw von Bock only as a soldier without interest in politics. They correctly surmised that the results of his enthusiasm in the late twenties had been more than enough to keep him strictly to military matters.

So far von Bock while in command had shown that he was a man able to handle civilians satisfactorily in the Prussian sense (not equally acceptable farther west) and that he was a thoroughly experienced staff officer. His known character as a disciplinarian was also all in his favour. But a far more important test was now to come.

He had to prove his ability as organiser of the new German Army. Von Fritsch, von Rundstedt, von Leeb and others were



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fully engaged already in bringing into effect the plans drawn up ten or twelve years before. But von Bock was no wizard; he had no gift for such work. He contributed no ideas; he was at a loss when called upon to make suggestions for improvements in the plans of rearmament. It is not enough to say, as 'Bock's own deathboys' said, that he had only a small share in planning and organising the expansion of the army. He had no part in it at all.

Meantime the antagonism between the National Socialist Cabinet and certain high officers of the Reichswehr came to a climax. The demands by von Fritsch and others for prerogatives kept pace with the increase of the armed forces. Not content with their responsibilities and powers over the army, they held that in order to bring the striking power of the national forces to its highest point, they must be able to intervene in political administration when and where they deemed it necessary.

Hitler, seeing in these pretensions a threat to his own supremacy and that of the Nazi Party, pressed a demand that von Bock be given the control of the newly formed Army Group III in Saxony's capital of Dresden. To this command the Reichswehr leaders did not object. Von Bock had not been conspicuous for his strong pro-Nazi inclinations, though he had not shown any partisanship for the Reichswehr leaders, but in the minds of these leaders he was a professional soldier of recognised qualifications for the training of such a group. This appointment would be governed by similar considerations to those of the General in control of the forces of occupation in Austria, a command which now fell to him as head of Army Group III.

There were, however, political dangers in the assumption by the National Socialist Government of the responsibility for the selection of the man in command of the first military occupation of a country outside Germany. For the first time the army was called upon to execute a big job which necessarily included difficult political administration. At any time the Reichswehr could create an 'incident' that would have allowed them to keep permanently in their hands the power vested in them for this occasion. It was under such a menace to his supremacy that Hitler had broken von Fritsch and the most dangerous of his entourage, and he could strike as hard again. But there was a limit to ruthlessness in deal-

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ing with army chiefs, and he knew how to play 'possum' while allowing one scandal to be forgotten.

Added to this, the change-over in Austria would have been carried out more smoothly on the military side by a man with the prestige of the old Prussian military caste.

Von Bock's contempt for everything Austrian was well known. His three or four Austrian war decorations were 'that scrap iron'. It was anticipated that officers of the Austrian Army would be overawed by his haughty bearing and domineering manner. But here he played his role too well, and it immediately seemed that he was going to embark on internal politics again.

Herman Göring had entered Austria as German Air Minister, and on arriving had established himself with the pomp and display he considered appropriate. As a member of the Reich Government he was in a position to invite von Bock to parades, but his invitations were declined without even a pretence of politeness. In physique the opposite of Göring, von Bock's purposeful asceticism constituted a silent reproof to Göring's Falstaffian appearance and habits. When the two men were compelled to be together at official meetings there was no harmonious collaboration between them. Von Bock's manners were not improved by his desire to impress his new Austrian subordinates with a German General's precedence over any civilian, even though like Göring the civilian was Minister for Air and once a lieutenant in the Air Force.

So it came about that the working of the military *Gleichschaltung* (which may be translated as co-ordination with as much force as is necessary) was left to Colonel Rommel, and von Bock returned to Dresden to take charge of the forces that occupied the second zone (north) of Czechoslovakia. He was accompanied on his entry into the Sudetenland by his then nine-year-old son, wearing a sailor suit with béret. He wished to impress the little boy, as he told foreign pressmen, with 'the beauty and exhilaration of soldiering'. Outside soldiering, von Bock, like so many Prussian officers, had a closed mind. His experiences, though he had not been without foreign contacts as during the juggling with rearmament during the formal Treaty period of disarmament, had not taught him the psychological flexibility needed in diplomacy. He issued a proclamation which he read out from the balcony of

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the Town Hall in Friedland as follows :

'Sudeten Germans—Racial Comrades, the hour of deliverance has come. German troops are on the point of taking your land under the protection and sovereignty of the Reich . . . Let everyone go to his work. Let each in his place co-operate as soon as possible in production.'

Learning nothing from the feverish activities of von Ribbentrop and scores of other Nazi officials, including Hitler, in disguising their criminal schemes, von Bock discarded the mask and exposed Germany's object: the acquisition by fraud and force, by bloodshed if necessary, of the Czech armament industry and other sources of production. The Sudeten Germans were just the worm on the hook.

The subsequent purges that affected almost every larger formation of the Reichswehr did not affect von Bock. On the contrary, he went a step higher, being put in charge of the most important Army Group inside the German Army: Group No. I at Berlin. The reasons for this change were basically the same as those which made the German Cabinet appoint him Group Commander, Group III. For the Nazi Party he was a tamed Prussian of the old military order. Party confidence in him had even been strengthened by his non-committal attitude during the fateful days early in 1938 when von Fritsch thought that the scales of political fortune might be tipped in favour of the Reichswehr. Many of the other group commanders were changed, as was the Chief of the General Staff. Von Bock's advancement was accepted in the army as a sign that he had taken over the role of an 'internal Quisling'. However, people who knew the private circumstances which led to this appointment and to his survival in the armed forces would ascribe it more positively to General Wilhelm Keitel. If von Bock passively accepted Party domination, Keitel actively supported it. Von Bock's attitude was correct, and acceptable to the Government. He paid enough lip service to the Party in his addresses to troops to avoid being considered lukewarm.

At the beginning of the campaign against Poland he led the army group from the north, invading the country from East Prussia. The operations in Poland illustrate von Bock's limitations. Had he not, in co-operation with the Commander-in-

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Chief, von Brauchitsch, called in von Rundstedt and von Leeb, the determined Polish resistance would have been more difficult to break. The swift and complete German victory was due to von Rundstedt's circumspect plans and their execution, and not to the mediocre handling of the Northern Army Group by von Bock.

In the campaign in the west von Bock was the Commander-in-Chief of the Army Group B, and directed the thrust against the Lower Somme. During all the Polish and French campaigns his work was not outstanding. He held a high command, and the progress of the forces under his leadership was made possible to a large extent by the extraordinary feats of his colleagues. He was nothing but a number among many abler men. In the Russian campaign he was more severely tested and his deficiencies were exposed. He commanded the central body of the corps and groups that struck the first blows. In the north and south his more gifted colleagues had to synchronise their operations with the movements which von Bock made.

It may surprise a military observer, after learning of von Bock's strange career, that he was entrusted with a task upon which the fate of the entire campaign depended. He had spectacular successes that missed the strategic goal of the entire German plan. After heavy frontier battles on each side of the Polish Pripet Marshes, and after the subsequent advance of both wing groups in the north and in the south, von Bock advanced again and again until he arrived in front of Moscow. It is now established that the German High Command never intended to fight any violent battle in front of Moscow, but relied on the ability of the man in command of the central groups to bring about decisive battles of annihilation against the Red armies that would finish the war even before Smolensk was captured. Whether through the ability of the Russian leaders or the limitations of von Bock, the German plan broke down. He conquered territory but not the Russian armies.

Perhaps the German Commander-in-Chief of that time, von Brauchitsch, and the Chief of the German General Staff, Halder, thought that their presence immediately behind the headquarters of the leader of the Central Army Groups would ensure success. Already, perhaps, the hand of the civilian Hitler had made itself

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felt by his fear of entrusting this crucial task to a more capable man, von Rundstedt for example, whose success might give the victor in the field too much glory and publicity. The fact remains that von Bock alone led the German Armies, and that his early operations in 1941 led up to a situation that had never been foreseen by the planners in the German Reichswehr Ministry, and against which the exponents of German military thought had uttered warnings since the days of Clausewitz.

Confronted with the alternative of retiring into winter positions or making a bold all-out effort, the German High Command, led by von Brauchitsch and Halder, and supported by a representative group of senior officers, advised the prudent course. The Supreme Commander, Adolf Hitler, insisted on attack. Von Bock remained in charge of the central group, and set about putting into practice the form of strategy that will be known in history as the period when 'intuition' was dominant in war.

Hitler had picked a man who needed the direction of a master of strategy. The ideal directing brain would have been Baron Werner von Fritsch, who had been dead for two years, murdered near Warsaw; the best substitute would have been Gerd von Rundstedt, who was now temporarily relieved of his command in the south; failing these, the combination of the men who had been largely responsible for the direction against Poland, France, the Balkans and Russia, von Brauchitsch and Halder, would have been the next best substitute. These last were the best that could be achieved at that time, when the National Socialist Government still had to keep watch on the internal political situation. The Hitler-von Bock combination was about the worst for Germany that could be formed, and its existence contributed substantially to the shortening of the war and the certainty of Allied victory.

During the Battle of Moscow von Bock's mediocrity encountered the brilliancy of the Soviet Marshal Zhukov, who, when surrounded by von Bock's assault forces in a semi-circle from north to south of Moscow, and faced with strong pressure in the centre of this arc, knew how to exploit the 'inner line' formed by Moscow's system of communications. When the battle ended in ignominious defeat for the Germans, and the beginning of a Napoleonic retreat through Russia in the winter of 1941-2,

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Gerd von Rundstedt, recalled at the last moment, stopped the rout. With the assistance of List he directed a disengaging action which, though it cost the German forces enormous casualties, did restore the situation. Von Bock went on sick leave with 'stomach trouble', developed very opportunely. He was inured to hardship and had been known throughout his career for his iron constitution.

The German attempt to regain the initiative on a large scale, and to seek a decision in the east before the increasing might of the western democracies could come into play, resulted in the German plan for the Battle of Stalingrad. Though an Allied invasion from the west was not likely at that time, Hitler sent his best man to the west to guard against it, for there were unknown potentialities in the hostile populations of the occupied countries. Von Rundstedt took over the combined German forces in Holland, Belgium and France. Then von Bock appeared again in the limelight of eastern operations, greatly to the surprise of everyone who had followed his career and understood his military calibre.

We are still in the period of the intuition that started the last German assault on Moscow and was now running wild during this 1942 offensive. With Field Marshal von Brauchitsch retired, Field Marshal von Leeb replaced, Field Marshal von Rundstedt engaged in the distant theatre of western Europe, von Bock alone remained to advise the Führer, who as Commander-in-Chief held all the strings in his hands. Only a man of the limited strategical conceptions of von Bock could have advised any Commander-in-Chief to split the German assault force while operations were half-way through in order to attack the Caucasus and the Battle of Stalingrad was still raging. This dispersion of power flouted the established and tested rules of strategy. But if the campaign revealed the untrained directive of a lance-corporal, it also revealed in its execution a man who did not know the value of human life. The blood bath through which the German armed forces went was of von Bock's making, and it is not too much to conclude that his sense of responsibility was replaced by fanatical satisfaction in assisting his men to 'crown a soldier's life by a glorious death in the field'.

It is important to distinguish between von Bock and the so-called 'intuition advocates', the generals on the immediate and

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personal staff of Hitler. Von Bock was far more the professional soldier than Generals Jodl, Warlimont and their kind. There is no doubt that in normal times von Bock would have made his name as a subordinate general. Given responsibility beyond his capacity, and even worse, called upon to advise a civilian with supreme political and military power, who overnight thought he had become a strategist, von Bock's leadership was disastrous for the armies under his command.

# Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz

*'I will show that the U-boat alone can win  
this war. Nothing is impossible for us'*

DOENITZ

Karl Doenitz comes from Mecklenburg, whose inhabitants are as stolid and phlegmatic as the Pomeranians. The admiral has none of the native characteristics of his countrymen and he is eager to have it known that his antecedents were 'shipowners and landowners'—and not 'fishermen and farmers', which they in fact were. Class conscious though he is, he makes no pretence of ranking with the Prussian aristocracy: rather does he despise it because it regards the German Navy as the junior service. He is, in fact, much more interested in the racial nobility of the Nordic type than in man-made titles.

Born in 1892, Doenitz entered the Imperial German Navy as an ensign in 1913, and in due course reported to the captain of the light cruiser *Breslau* then attached to the German Mediterranean Squadron. His brother officers watched him carefully and finally decided that he was a bad sailor and a worse officer, and their slighting and sarcastic remarks, such as 'Doenitz the Prussian landlubber', soon touched him on the raw.

In 1914 the *Breslau* made her dash to Constantinople with the *Goeben*, and then began a long period of inactivity for Doenitz and his colleagues. He has circulated the story that as a young officer, ambitious and longing to see the enemy, he could not rest content with loafing on the beautiful Pera beach. Truth to tell, of course, he could no longer stand the teasing from his brother officers, and after 1916 he almost became a mental case. On the few occasions when the German-Turkish Squadron had gone into action he had shown that his nerves were not as steady as the German naval officer's code of honour demanded. Not that he ran away from his post, or asked to be relieved; but his ashen face at the moment 'action stations' were sounded did not escape notice. The 'Prussian landlubber' became 'yellow Doenitz!'

Pride came to the rescue, and in order to put an end to such gibes he applied for a transfer to the U-boat branch of the



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Imperial Navy. This was willingly granted because the British Navy was playing havoc with the U-boats in 1916, replacements for U-boat commanders were needed daily, and (in contrast to Doenitz's present regulations) the U-boat service was then on a voluntary basis.

Promotion was granted immediately, though to Doenitz's disappointment his second gold stripe did not come till he had left Constantinople, so that he was unable to parade it in front of his hecklers. An uneventful career began for him as commander of the small U-boat 'U-25'. He was cautious, and despite a number of sorties was hardly ever attacked. His claims to sinkings were therefore small. The technical side of U-boat warfare interested him most, machinery and hull construction being his special interests. He sent a number of memoranda to the Admiralty, who thus became aware of the little First Lieutenant, and reward followed when he was given command of the larger 'underwater cruiser' *UB-68*. Long cruises followed, and towards the end of the war he was back again in the Mediterranean.

A few weeks before the Armistice Doenitz attacked a British convoy off Malta, and was immediately engaged by a sloop and an armed trawler. Slowly the *UB-68* came to the surface, undamaged. Doenitz ordered 'Abandon ship' without trying to use his gun which was of considerable calibre. If any such incident were to be reported to-day to the present Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz, a court-martial would follow for the officer responsible, with the severest of sentences—perhaps even 'To be shot at dawn for cowardice in face of the enemy'.

Having scuttled his boat, Doenitz was fished out of the water and brought to a prison camp in Lancashire, where he learned that Germany had sued for an armistice and that a republic was being formed. He also knew that appointments in a new German Republican Navy would be scarce, especially for one who might come up against former brother-officers from the old *Breslau*. Meanwhile he fretted in his prison camp, and the best jobs at home were being snatched in his absence. He resolved to get out of the camp before anybody else, because if he left with all the others his chances of employment in Germany would be almost hopeless. But without wounds or illness what could he do? British prison-camp administration observed the rules of the Geneva

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Convention and looked after the officers so conscientiously that they were kept free from disease. There was only one way—to pretend to be mad. And that Doenitz did—with peculiar success. His neurotic temperament gave him perverse inspiration, and he thought out and performed ridiculous acts of the type expected from a demented patient. He was sent to Germany among the early releases.

Years later, naval officers who had been with him in that prison camp were dumbfounded when they heard that he was climbing higher and higher. They themselves had been convinced that Doenitz was a lunatic, and so surprised was a German naval doctor who had treated him during his period of supposed aberration that he refused to believe he had been deluded by a mentally sound impostor. Confronted by Doenitz 'returned to normal', he expressed his congratulations, but as soon as he had left his presence he turned to a friend and said: 'It's all very well. But you can say what you like, that man's cowardice and egotism border on lunacy.'

Republican Germany did not have a submarine fleet. And much as certain naval circles would have liked to construct secret experimental craft and keep up with the rapid development in that instrument of naval warfare, the German Admiralty did not dare to break the clause of the Treaty of Versailles that forbade its construction. Doenitz was not disturbed by the restriction. At the writing desk and on the drawing board he developed new ideas in safety. Near Kiel a 'school for anti-submarine warfare' was founded. This really was a school for submarine training of officers and men, but without ships the theoretical knowledge of the crews could not be put to practical test. The school was the utmost concession that the discreet Admiral Zenker would make to his enthusiastic young officers.

But desk work alone wins little promotion in the fighting services. Doenitz could not hope for higher rank—not to mention flag rank—if there were no submarines. Before he could secure command of a submarine fleet and issue his orders from a cosy office in Berlin or some Baltic seaport, there must be a government in Berlin that would give him that fleet in defiance of the Treaty Powers. Such a government was possible only under a Hitler. And Doenitz came to these conclusions because of recent

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history. He knew that Göring envisaged a big air fleet as soon as Hitler (who was already *his* Führer, if not yet the nation's) could take over the Cabinet. Doenitz also knew of Erhard Milch's ambitious preparations towards that end. Was it not conceivable that he could hitch his wagon to the rising star in a similar scheme? Had not the all-knowing, all-promising Hitler already announced that 'if only the last war had lasted another two years the U-boats alone would have forced England to her knees'? Doenitz was gradually attaining to rank superior to that of the average operational submarine commander; it was high time that U-boats were afloat again. He was tired of the cautious attitude of Admiral Raeder, sick of hearing that the Republican Government had trouble enough to fulfil the demands of the Reichswehr without listening to those of the crazy submarine people. These explanations had been like music in his ears while there was still a chance that he would have to take over command of one of those unpleasant ships. But now his outlook had changed.

Doenitz's sponsor for his entry into the Nazi Party was the enterprising Herman Göring. They became close friends. Göring's bulk did not present a heroic spectacle aboard ship (he is violently seasick in the slightest swell), but as a Nazi he was worth cultivating, and Göring was quick to see that Doenitz was already nursing a grudge founded on jealousy that made him unbearable to subordinates and superiors alike. As a junior officer he had been glad to save his own skin; as a commander he welcomed the fate that put him into a drawing-office; and now when he could see himself becoming a flag officer he wanted all or nothing, though he was still only a commander. But the so-called revolution moved quickly in those days, though it always avoided public recognition of its far-reaching aims. One year more, and—in 1933—Commander Doenitz received official sanction to carry out his tests in the open, and to search German industry for factories that could produce the first submarines.

The Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, Raeder, was unaware that the submarine specialist was secretly starting a campaign against him. Only one who had himself arrived at his position by intrigue could have suspected that a simple commander was talking to flag officers and insinuating that Raeder ought to be pensioned off because he laid too much emphasis on

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the construction of surface vessels. Soon, with the gradual expansion of the German Navy and the mushroom development of the submarine branch, the question that arose was whether the officer who had done research work for years on end should remain head of the branch and gradually attain highest rank, or whether a tried and experienced admiral—even though not a submarine specialist—should take over and apply to the branch his wider knowledge and larger experience of responsibility. There was no doubt, as Doenitz knew, that general custom and tradition were on the side of Raeder, but the climber was pulling Party strings long before Raeder knew that Nazi coils were gathering round the hitherto sacred army and navy. So whenever he suggested to Hitler the name of a head for the submarine branch of the German Navy, the Führer evasively suggested that the pleasant and smiling Captain Doenitz (as he had now become) should carry on. The Führer had been happy to see how well that important branch was coming along. And Raeder, avoiding a tiresome dispute, acquiesced.

February of 1936 was a great month for Doenitz. He successfully pressed a demand that the *Führer der Unterseeboote* should be directly responsible to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy—to no one else. This meant unlimited power for him over his branch. He ordered promotion, he demanded moneys, he asked for shore expansion for his bases and he reported directly to the Commander-in-Chief, and no one else would know what he was doing unless he so wished it. A Commander-in-Chief in the full sense of the term could not tolerate such pretensions, but Raeder still acquiesced. He had seen danger, and sensed the intrigue against him, and the only satisfaction he could get was limiting Doenitz's appointment to the command of the First Submarine Flotilla (*Weddigen Flotilla*), which began as an experimental force.

During the Spanish Civil War Doenitz ordered manoeuvres designed to show what the modern submarine could do against a protected convoy of merchantmen. The result was disappointing. The submarines reported failure. Doenitz, who up to then had been chiefly responsible for technical development, had now to take up tactics and their evolution. The fore-runners of the 'wolf pack attacks' were tried out, and still there

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was no marked success. Doenitz went farther. In his new investigations it came to light that the naval charts at his disposal were not very suitable for submarines, and, whether intentionally (as was not unlikely for obvious reasons) or not, the special charts of the British naval base of Portland were even less so. Much against his inclination he had to board one of his own submarines, the *U-37*, and take to sea. Off Portland the German submarine started investigations within territorial waters. It was peacetime, but the British Navy was not asleep. The destroyer *Wolfhound* observed something, and to scare the foreign ship to the surface dropped practice depth charges which made such a terrifying noise that Doenitz ordered his commander to surface. The commander made suitable apologies, and the incident was closed as far as the British were concerned. For Doenitz, however, it had a bad effect. When the *Wolfhound* practice depth charges went off he was seized with the idea that Hitler had made a surprise blitzkrieg without notifying him, or that at least Raeder had seen through his game and had sent him off in order to get rid of his first and most dangerous rival. Doenitz's lack of nerve was again shown up, this time in front of most of his crew, and the tale spread through the German Navy with the mysterious speed, as such tales do, of an African jungle signal.

Out of danger, and with his feet on solid ground, he regained his courage. Count Felix Luckner, captain of the *Seeadler*, the sailing raider of the last war, boasted in public that he had sunk many a ship but never killed a sailor, and that he was proud of such a record. Doenitz answered—also in public—that he (as a good German) was unable to understand such chivalry of the sea. To men like Adolf Hitler these were 'splendid words' (as Count Zeppelin said to the German people who sped him on his pioneer way to raid Great Britain); and Hitler knew nothing of the behaviour of the ruthless Doenitz when he was sweating with fear off Portland.

Doenitz's close connection with the master of the Luftwaffe made it easy for him to get collaboration in peacetime for perfecting the employment of planes as spotters for submarine flotillas. In the matter of production he was influenced by his Luftwaffe friends in quite a different way. He knew his Göring, and the mental limitations which made that fire-eater rather too

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subjective in his calculations. Courage may have an element of obtuseness. Fear should not master a man, but it is the beginning of intelligence, and Doenitz, who at home could keep his head, saw the potential strength behind Allied unpreparedness. He did not draw the superficial conclusion that the Luftwaffe would always be able to keep enemy aircraft out of the German sky. Consequently he relied on the products of the Baltic and North Sea shipyards as little as possible. Submarines, whether small or large, were made sectionally all over Germany. The process of final launching needed comparatively little time. Doenitz expected that these ports would be bombarded in due course, and in this, as is known, he was not a bad prophet.

As for man-power, he arranged with the other chiefs of the armed forces that a pool should be formed of 100,000 of the fittest of Germany's youth, calculating that this number provided an ample reserve for his future needs in war. He could not foresee that in the years of war his former friend Göring would be short of men and would 'borrow' heavily from the pool. Doenitz also adopted a new scheme for the navy. He ordered that there should be no one between him and the commandants; that each commandant should adopt a *kameradschaftliche Haltung* (a comradely behaviour) towards his crew; and that class distinction between officers and men should be unequivocally eliminated. He had his own experience of the dangers in the restricted quarters of a German U-boat that may arise in a moment of crisis, should the crew have cause to resent the bearing of the officers towards them.

When the present war broke out Doenitz's influence increased, but not to the extent he had expected. Raeder's was still powerful, the more so after the successful conclusion of the Norwegian campaign. Doenitz had to bide his time. Finally he began to ask what was the use of a German fleet bottled up in Norwegian fjords? What was the use of one single surface craft in the strategy of the German High Command? The fleet had to watch events in the North Sea, to seek an opportunity when nothing stronger than a British trawler was on patrol there. Then the German *Panzerschiffe* and the pocket battleships would have a chance of a hit-and-run action with little to show for it and perhaps days at sea wasted. How many more submarines could he build with

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all those men and material. The *Graf Spee* and the *Bismarck* spoke volumes. Could Admiral Raeder produce alternative plans? Of course not. The departure of the *Scharnhorst*, the *Gneisenau* and the *Lützow* from the French Channel ports was a remarkable feat of escape. Not a naval battle, but the successful escape of a frightened navy. Was this sort of thing to continue?

A disappointed Führer gladly listened to a man who promised him success in a sphere which up to 1943 had not brought much glory to the Reich. Admiral Raeder had to go, and at the beginning of 1943 the much younger Doenitz took over. His appointment was a smack in the face for scores of other admirals who, as a remedy for an embarrassing personal situation, were immediately dismissed the service. Doenitz felt the danger that might gather round him from silent resentment. Methods that were strange even in Nazi Germany's armed forces were officially introduced, and the higher flag officers experienced them first. Admiral Boehm, German Naval Chief in Norway, was retired immediately and without explanation, to be replaced by Admiral Ciliax, who had commanded the *Scharnhorst*, the *Gneisenau* and the *Lützow* in their escape from the Channel. Boehm had more than once spoken openly against the German treatment of Norwegians. The Gestapo knew that, of course, and it was part of their job to show Doenitz that they knew it. He relied for his future more on the support of his old friend Himmler than on naval associates. Ciliax was the man for Doenitz, as he was for the Gestapo, a man who in every other country (except Japan) would have been dealt with by the law for his personal conduct. It was essentially as an emissary of the watchful Gestapo that Admiral Fricke went to Italy to represent the interests of the German High Command in the Italian Navy. Probably his presence reinforced the decision that Italian officers had to take when Marshal Badoglio ordered them to join the Allied Navies in the Mediterranean. Doenitz was gathering the right people round him.

As soon as he became Naval Commander-in-Chief he started a propaganda campaign of his own. Addressing submarine crews the head of the German Navy emulated Goebbels himself in volubility and gesture. This exhibition was only the outward sign of a development that had been growing within the Navy for a

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long time. Earlier in its existence the German Navy—at first the Imperial German Navy—was eager to copy the customs and the dignity of the British Navy, the ‘Silent Service’. A German Imperial Naval officer who had stood on the quarter deck and addressed his ship’s company with the gestures of a town crier would have been retired next day. Officers who, for example, behaved like the former Lieutenant Reinhardt Heydrich of the Republican Navy, were dismissed the Service. Inwardly the British standards of reticence and correct behaviour were laughed at, like the British observance of internationally acknowledged customs of naval courtesy, but the external form was followed. With Doenitz all that went by the board. The German naval officer who gloats as his victims swim in burning oil, who even rams the lifeboats of a torpedoed tanker with his U-boat, now represents the heroic ideal.

The cruelties of the German Army in Russia and the occupied countries are accurately recorded because there the Germans deal with civilians and sooner or later the facts are published. But enough evidence has emerged from reports of escaped Allied seamen to show that there is no more chivalry under the Nazis at sea than on land. Under Doenitz there is little difference between the German field gendarmes of Bryansk and Kharkov and the U-boat commanders in the North Atlantic.

Doenitz will leave his mark—the mark of Hitler.



## Admiral Erich Raeder

*The concessions of the weak are the concessions of fear.*

EDMUND BURKE, ON CONCILIATIONS WITH AMERICA. MARCH 22ND, 1775.

With his mild blue eyes and kindly open face Erich Raeder has none of the appearances of the typical admiral; his manner and bearing are rather those of a public schoolmaster, actually his father's profession. His hair, parted in the middle, is closely cropped at the sides in the style of a German schoolmaster. Out of uniform he might pass for a scientist, a surgeon or even a clergyman. He has cultivated a striking resemblance to several naval chaplains once under his command.

His sensitive nature and the kindness that is born and bred in him are more characteristic of the northern provinces of his origin than of other parts of Germany, and in temperament there could be no greater contrast than that between Raeder and the typical Prussian Junker army general. In public he tries to look grim and determined to suit his office; but regimentation and discipline, measured by Prussian standards, have never been congenial to him, perhaps because he looks for individuality in other men and respects it. A lack of will power is apparent in his face, and borne out in his career.

From his early days he identified himself with the sailor's code of chivalry; but in his book he violated truth and chivalry together by crediting that glory to the German Navy and denying it to the British, and for years before his retirement he was urging ruthless U-boat warfare. Even in the face of scrupulous British adherence to international law—as when the submarine *Salmon* ignored the huge target of the *Bremen* in October 1939—he has scorned all rules when it happened to suit him, and has associated himself fully with Nazi practices.

He had his early standards of honour but he gradually deserted them, reluctantly perhaps, but completely and finally. Unable fully to acquiesce, and without the will to resist, he compromised and compounded with the devil.

His fellow Germans have always been cynical about him, seeing a weak man beset by impatience, whose distress when faced by

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the forces of ruthlessness and brutality at work was such that he would almost go to the same vicious lengths to rid himself of it.

Erich Raeder was born on 24th April 1876 at the small seaside resort of Wandsbeck near Hamburg, a son of Dr. Raeder, director and headmaster of a public school. In the spring of 1894 his father was transferred to the little town of Grünberg in Silesia, where the boy, who had the benefit of special teaching by his father during his schooldays, passed his matriculation with honours. Though he could have waited at least six months before taking any steps about his future career, he applied at once to join the Imperial German Navy. After three years of strict training as a cadet and midshipman he became a sub-lieutenant in 1897.

Families like Raeder's had a special interest in the acute political controversies that arose with the founding of the German Imperial Navy. The Reichs Government had to reconcile the Kaiser's strict orders on the formation of the Navy with conflicting external and internal political problems. Government and military authorities themselves were not to be convinced that a powerful navy was in Germany's interest; and Prussian interests, it was thought, were certainly endangered by it. The arch-conservative Junker circles of Prussia argued that no state, however powerful, could concentrate on two branches of the armed forces at one time, that the Reichstag, if called on for heavy naval expenditure would restrict outlay on the army. They foresaw, too, that a big naval programme would make a clash with Britain inevitable. Their ideal international policy would have allowed Prussian Germany to be Britain's sword on the Continent, while the British Navy kept open Germany's rear communication with the remainder of the world.

Opposing this school of thought was a section of the middle class, largely recruited from such families as Raeder's, who thought that the geographical position of the German Reich, the most important land power in Central Europe, entitled it to free trade overseas and a proper share in colonies. It was intolerable to them that German communications with German colonies or other overseas nations should be under the constant threat, as they saw it, of Britain and her navy. So they said: 'Let us

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build as much as we can as fast as we can, and let us have a *frisch-frohlichen* (short and merry) naval war to show England where her limits lie.' The extreme imperialism of this section divided it sharply from the pan-germanism inspired by the Junkers class, which at that time had no interest in the conquest of British colonies and the possessions of other nations overseas.

The Imperial German Navy therefore built up its naval officers corps with a different background from that of the Army. The average German naval officer of that time had discipline equal to that of an officer of the Royal Prussian Footguards, with less pretentiousness in a social sense, but was extravagant and very sensitive on the subject of German colonial expansion and German sovereignty of the seas. A professor of history speaking in 1931 illustrated the feeling in the young Imperial German Navy with the following simile:

'The German Imperial Navy, and in particular its officers, were like people who, though they generally behave quite reasonably and well, go mad at the sight of a green umbrella or a yellow bathing costume. To the naval officers of those days yellow and green were represented by such words as "the British Navy" (and the professor did not use the German translation *Britische Flotte* but the English term instead), 'British Empire' (again the English word was used), and *Seegeltung* (seapower). These words had a strangely confusing effect on an otherwise intelligent corps of young men.'

This then was the spiritual atmosphere in which a young German Imperial naval officer was brought up.

The year 1903 saw Raeder at the Naval Academy, which he left after two years. In 1906 he was transferred to the information department of the navy, Department A (foreign countries) dealing with the foreign press and the naval publications 'Naval Review' (*Marine Rundschau*) and 'Nauticus'. The Chief of Personnel of the Imperial German Navy who made the appointment must have been a good psychologist, for though Raeder had fully imbibed the ideas of his circle he was aware that in other countries, especially in Britain and British overseas possessions, those ideas would arouse suspicion and uneasiness. Clear-headed and responsive to another point of view, he was exactly the man to deal with foreign press questions and to present an

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acceptable front to the many anxious inquirers from other countries who had to be received by the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial German Navy.

Raeder did well. He had an able pen, and his bearing in discussion was composed, if neither eloquent nor demonstrative. In association with foreigners and various types of strangers it was in his favour that he had never learned the habit of heel-clicking, or the stiff and elaborate bowing of the Prussian cavalry officer. Advancement followed quickly. His Imperial Majesty William II himself picked the crew for his yacht *Hohenzollern*, and Commander Raeder was suddenly honoured by being appointed its navigation officer.

The Kaiser was an odd being. In Potsdam and at the court of Berlin he fancied himself as the sabre-rattling omnipotent Prussian War Lord and chief of all Junkers. As soon as he put on the gold-braided blue of the German Grand Admiral he tried to exhibit a more 'liberal' character. In his own words, 'I have never felt more English than when I wear my naval uniform'. And this innocent remark, ideal for *Punch*, put his aspirations in a nutshell.

Commander Raeder of the Foreign Press Department had attracted the attention of the All-Highest because of the moderate views he put before the foreign press. This moderation had a disarming purpose, but the Kaiser thought it was genuine, and that Raeder would make an ideal theatre prop for the setting of the yacht *Hohenzollern*.

From 1913 to January 1918 Raeder was the First Admiralty Staff Officer and Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the reconnaissance forces of the German Grand Fleet. In this capacity he took part in the bombardment of the English coast on 2nd November 1914, the bombardment of Hartlepool on 16th December 1914, the Battle of the Dogger Bank on 24th April 1915 and the Battle of Jutland on 21st May 1916. His immediate superior was Admiral Hipper, and he followed that Admiral during the Battle of Jutland from the battle cruiser *Seidlitz* to the *Lützow*, and later on to the *Hindenburg*. Later he was obliged officially to fall into line with the general propaganda which claimed the Battle of Jutland—or the Battle of the Skagerrak—as the Germans call it—to be a gigantic German victory. Privately Raeder has agreed that Jutland, though during certain

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phases it might be considered a tactical German success, was a resounding strategic defeat for the Imperial Navy. It is characteristic of Raeder that on such an important question he held both an official and a private view.

In January 1918 he was made commandant of the cruiser *Köln II*, but was relieved of that command in October of the same year. Though the navy of the Republic was then cut down from a war strength of several hundred thousand to fifteen thousand, Raeder was not only retained in service but made head of the central department of the German Admiralty. That position he held from December 1918 to March 1920. The principle under which he worked was 'Save what you can from the sinking ship', and, in violation of the relevant paragraph of the Treaty of Versailles, much valuable material was retained and stored away.

From 1920 to July 1922 he was head of the naval archives, and began to study the development of tactical and strategic naval questions during the last war as they affected Germany. Raeder himself has admitted that this study confirmed him in the belief that the German strategy of maintaining a replica of the British Grand Fleet was too expensive and out-moded. He saw the future of Germany's sea-power in cruiser warfare and in submarines. It was, of course, impossible for him to contemplate anything more, because, though the army and navy might circumvent the Treaty of Versailles, the presence of unauthorised battleships or battle cruisers, had they existed, could not be explained away. What could be done in defiance of the Treaty was to retain all plans and documents concerning submarine warfare during the last war. The Treaty strictly prohibited this: under her own pledge Germany was neither to have submarine training stations nor were her naval officers to have the apparatus with which to study the technique of submarine warfare.

As for cruiser warfare, Raeder himself published a two-volume work on that question for which the University of Kiel made him a Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*). On 1st July 1922 he was made a rear-admiral, a high rank in the depleted German Navy. His work at the marine archives had been most successful; and, as he left them, those archives were certainly not inferior in quality to those of the Reichswehr, which are probably the best in the world.

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From August 1922 to October 1924, Raeder was Inspector of Training and Education of the German Republican Navy; quite an important appointment in view of present events. While the strength of the Army was the main subject of internal conflict, with many different political forces aiding the Reichswehr officers in their sinister aims against the Government the problem of the navy was of a different kind. The mutiny of the German armed forces in the last war started in the navy, where left wing influence was incomparably stronger than in the army. Indeed, by 1923 the spirit of revolt of 1919 could hardly be said to exist in the army. If the navy was to be trained and educated at all in any political sense, the new Inspector, Rear-Admiral Raeder, certainly could not follow his native traditions. On the other hand if, in order to retain his high rank, he had proclaimed himself a Socialist, he would have been too obviously an apostate. Professedly he was a Democrat and a strong believer in the Republic. Here the 'stage-prop liberalism' which had aided him in becoming the navigation officer of the *Hohenzollern*, served him again. Raeder was thus a 'Democrat', and a young republic was grateful for finding at least one white sheep among all the black. In reality he was nothing of the kind. Under his inspectorate the mental attitude of the naval personnel of the German Navy was slowly but steadily reformed; and the themes on which inspectors and teachers played were revenge for defeat and the wiping out by war of that black mark in German naval memory—the mutiny at Kiel in 1918.

By the time Raeder relinquished his appointment in 1924 to become commanding admiral of the light reconnaissance forces of the North Sea, the reversal of opinion inside the German Navy was well under way. The officers' corps could breathe more freely in regard to their actions and utterances. A new framework of thought, social conduct and behaviour was being shaped.

The old Imperial German Naval Officer Corps, of which Raeder was a perfect product, might have lost their heads on political questions during the late 'nineties and the early years of this century, but the members were unselfish among themselves, an unpretentious, clean-living, humane body of men. They had none of the arrogance of the Prussian Junker officer towards civilians.

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Many of them were interested in modern science, which would have been considered a crime in crack Prussian regiments then, and their conception of life, (always excluding politics) contrasted favourably in many ways with the rest of Germany.

In the young naval officer of 1924, especially after Admiral Raeder had finished his term as Inspector of Education and Training, little of all this was to be found. Only 1,000 out of 200,000 volunteers being needed yearly for replacements in the navy, the typical officer became as arrogant, as intolerant and overbearing as his opposite number in the army.

Here is a significant example. Two ships of the line, the *Schleswig-Holstein* and the *Hessen*, on manoeuvres in the Baltic under the command of an admiral, put into port at a fashionable Baltic seaside resort. They arrived at 5 o'clock in the afternoon; by 7 o'clock both ships were decorated and a dinner and gala reception was ordered. The élite of the town's visitors were asked to attend. The hammocks of the crew served as seats for the ladies and gentlemen; the reception finished at 3 o'clock in the morning; and while the officers went to their cabins the crew had to stand by on deck because the hammocks were still needed. When the manoeuvres started again at 7 o'clock in the morning a minimum of officers attended. At 10 o'clock that evening some of the crew were dismissed, and were allowed to go below for rest. Four years earlier such conduct would have meant a court-martial not only for the admiral and the captains but for the entire officer corps of the two ships down to the smallest lieutenant. In this instance the crew did not dare relate the story, for they knew of the crush of volunteers waiting to take their place.

From 1925 to 1928 Vice-Admiral Raeder was head of the Navy Staff of the Baltic Sea. During this time his activities were not watched, though certain left wing political quarters in Berlin were slowly collecting material against him. When Admiral Zenker, senior flag officer of the German Navy and Commander-in-Chief, retired, Raeder was appointed in his place by General Groener, then in charge of the whole armed forces of the Reich. Criticism was widespread, and at a press reception General Groener had to defend the appointment against those who

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accused Raeder of tolerating reactionary elements in the new Republican Navy.

Amongst naval officers there was widespread support for the Imperial family. An instance of this occurred when the light cruiser *Berlin* was visited by Prince Henry, a brother of the late Kaiser. He was received by the commandant of the officers' corps of that cruiser with all the honours that would have been his due in Imperial Germany. This was a gross violation of the disciplinary rules and regulations of the Republic, and the cruiser *Berlin* came under the jurisdiction and command of Vice-Admiral Raeder.

Groener's defence to this accusation was that no action had been taken against Vice-Admiral Raeder because he was away from his post on holiday at the time and could not be held responsible for incidents that had occurred in his absence. The commandant of the cruiser, however, had been retired.

This was an incredible explanation. It was a fact that Prince Henry had been on board the cruiser. It was equally true that he had been given Imperial honours, and the case was clear. Though the commandant might have been punished he should not have been retired. The man who should have borne the brunt of the criticism and taken the consequences was Admiral Raeder, who with an extremely weak excuse saved his own skin at the expense of the career of a subordinate officer. In marked contrast was the behaviour of Raeder's predecessor. Admiral Zenker had asked for his own retirement because a naval officer under his indirect command, Captain Lohmann, had speculated with departmental moneys in banks, cinemas, sausage factories and other undertakings. The official naval report says:

'In harmony with the old soldierly tradition, Admiral Zenker feels himself personally responsible for the transgressions of subordinates. Only his sense of duty caused him to remain at his post until this unedifying affair had been disposed of.'

With Admiral Raeder a new 'spirit' came into the navy. Not for him the 'old soldierly traditions', especially when they might endanger his personal career.

Raeder knew well enough that Groener's explanations had been transparent ones, and at the German Admiralty he set



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himself to demonstrate that in reality he was of the left wing. In this effort he managed to deceive a number of important politicians. In Berlin society, on the other hand, he was known as a reactionary, if a superficial one. As Commander-in-Chief, Baltic Sea, he had issued an Order of the Day in which he prohibited officers' wives from bobbing or shingling their hair, using rouge or any other cosmetics, wearing short skirts or having lacquered finger nails. The order was derided, but it was also held to have a deeper significance. It was an intrusion as arbitrary as the bullying of their men by officers of the *Schleswig Holstein* and the *Hessen*, or their demand for service that was beyond the duty of the navy. The Order of the Day trespassed on individual rights and intruded into spheres that were beyond the Commander-in-Chief's legal power. Verbal assurances of democratic sympathies did not compensate for reactionary and chauvinistic acts that recalled a naval slogan of the period of Wilhelm II—'Nothing is amiss for God and the Imperial Navy.'

When Hitler came to power Raeder was assured that the expansion of the Navy could be pressed forward, and that interference from foreign nations and governments was unlikely. To Hitler Raeder was a welcome Commander-in-Chief. He was capable, confined his ambition to his own service, and evinced no dangerous ideas or intentions. If Raeder was interested in politics, he showed no disposition to use his position to influence them. The Führer's knowledge of naval warfare was scanty, and the seasickness to which he was liable aboard ship, even in the calmest weather, did not encourage his familiarity with any branch of the navy. And whatever happened there was no danger that pocket battleships could start or support a putsch in Berlin. The power of the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy lay in the Baltic Sea and in part of the North Sea. He could hardly influence matters ashore. In short, though Raeder was not a Nazi, as Hitler knew, his activities were necessarily limited.

To Raeder the persecution of the Jews was unpleasant and brutal, but something it was safer to ignore and take no part in, for or against; and while it was going on he went away on a summer trip in the Baltic. Had he not prefaced his two volumes on cruiser warfare with the lofty introduction: 'May this work provide a memorial to the chivalrous methods of war of the

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German officers and men in contrast with the many unchivalrous acts of British officers who refused aid to sinking ships and fired on defenceless seamen? Yet on his desk was a signed photograph of Admiral Jellicoe!

• Raeder could lie directly, and deliberately, as well as indirectly and more insidiously, by closing his eyes to crimes at which he connived by being a high executive of the Government that ordered them.

When in 1936 Raeder was offered the rank of a Grand Admiral he refused it, putting out the story that he considered it inappropriate to accept a rank that had been adopted by Kaiser William and given by that monarch only to Prince Henry, Tirpitz and Koestler. This was a graceful gesture in the eyes of the German people, who were shown a Commander-in-Chief so modest that by his own choice he became, instead of a Grand Admiral, simply a General Admiral, a rank of ancient Dutch origin with no precedent in the German Navy. Naval officers under Raeder's command were more cynical.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 brought Raeder and his navy into the limelight internationally. He was opposed to serious commitments in that war, and was one of those who advised moderation. The reason was clear. A German fleet cruising on the east or west coast of Spain would become an easy prey. When during the same year the German steamer *Kamerun* was stopped by the Spanish Republican cruiser *Liberdad*, political circles in Berlin compelled Raeder to reinforce the German ships in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently 16 ships altogether, including three pocket battle-ships, were despatched. This action, it is known, was taken against the better judgment of Raeder, and he is reported to have tendered his resignation. But he did not resign, nor was the German naval force in Spanish waters reduced.

The scruples which for strategical reasons Raeder had about the strength of the German forces in Spanish waters did not prevent him from promptly ordering the bombardment of Almeria as a revenge for the bombing of the *Deutschland* in Ibiza. It was a savage course to adopt, completely inconsistent with the liberalism of the former chief of the Foreign Press Department of the Imperial Navy. The 'Democrat' had conveniently changed

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into the fanatical Nazi. The decline of the old Raeder was as rapid as, in the eyes of Hitler, it was pleasing.

In 1937 Raeder was made an honorary member of the National Socialist Party, but it was only after he had made pressing applications to Hitler that he was admitted to the Party.

In 1937 Raeder issued a number of disciplinary orders regarding the closing hours of officers' canteens, the prohibition of drinking at bars, smoking in uniform in the streets, etc., and in 1938 an order was published, although it was not enforced till later, altering the uniform of naval officers in such a way as to make them more 'military' in appearance. A German naval officer now presented a bizarre spectacle, for he had to wear blue breeches, black riding boots and spurs, Sam Browne belt and forage cap. Even in Germany the navy became known to the profane as 'the mounted marine cavalry'.

Other remarkable orders are found in addresses which Raeder gave during that year. At the Heroes Remembrance Day on 13th March 1939 when Raeder delivered the oration, the prevailing note was of peace and armaments. After the usual lamentations that misunderstood Germany cared only for peace and had built battleship after battleship and U-boat after U-boat only in order to save that peace for the rest of the world, this is what he said:

'We dispute no one's right to do what he considers necessary for his own security. We can neither be silent nor negative, however, when without any justification Germany is represented as being the sole reason for the present armaments race, and as alone possessing the intention of attacking its neighbours. We know that the elements responsible for this are not to be found where they want to drive their nations, that is, on the battlefield; but to the soldiers over there whom we respect as the chivalrous representatives of their countries, a soldierly word may be addressed: that is, that what Germany wants and needs is peace. That is not just talk, it is proved by many concrete examples. Germany requires, for her reconstructive work, a peaceful development extending over many years. . . .'

Then the tone changed.

'Germany must continue to think of her security. It is the will of the Führer that the German armed forces be strengthened and

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always be equal to their responsible task, however great the armaments of others. Where a deficiency has appeared it will be remedied. Where there is leeway it will be made good, and no one should believe that German weapons will be found blunt when the German sword is dishonoured or German blood spilt. Germany is the protector of all Germans within and without the frontiers. The gunfire at Almeria is proof of that. Germany hits' quickly and hard.'

At the same time Raeder paid tribute to the memory of 'our chivalrous opponents who died in the performance of their soldiers' duty to their country'. He had also ordered Dr. Givens, an official of the War Graves organisation, to lay a wreath on the monument in the Stahnsdorf Cemetery to 1,800 British soldiers who died as prisoners-of-war in Germany. With the appeal for peace to keep other nations quiet, and the warlike threat to compel them to accept German pretensions, Raeder had learned the German political technique, and could pass any Nazi test.

A demonstration that bordered on the ridiculous followed. On 23rd March 1939 Lithuania had been forced to cede 1,000 square miles around Memel to the German Reich, and Raeder invited his Führer to take possession. A seasick Führer on the pocket battleship *Deutschland* was accompanied by a portentous escort consisting of two battleships, scores of light cruisers and innumerable flotillas of destroyers and torpedo boats. Though the job could easily have been done by land from East Prussia, Raeder was given a chance to act as an impresario on the sea. Naval circles sharply criticised him.

On 20th May 1939 he spoke at Brunswick to an assembly of Hitler Youth, and said that 'capital ships alone are able to win or defend the supremacy of the seas'. This deliberate statement was noted by Doenitz, the ambitious chief of the German submarine branch. Raeder's struggle had been to keep a balance between the construction of surface craft and submarines, while a strong party within the German Government believed in submarines only.

Another speech made before the National Socialist Party Navy League in Dresden on 14th August 1939 was more explicit in its violence:

'As in 1914, states and nations which profess enmity towards

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us are at work to encircle us so as to cut off the possibilities of existence for the Reich. We all know that these hopes of our opponents, who again as in 1914 are led by Great Britain, are doomed to disappointment.'

Here Raeder came into line with the Commander-in-Chief of the German armed forces, Walther von Brauchitsch. Conscious, perhaps, that his utterances on Germany's place in the world had hitherto been lacking in emphasis, he seemed to be playing up to his master at Berchtesgaden, with the special object of ensuring his position as Commander-in-Chief when hostilities came. At any rate that object was attained.

One of his first acts of the war was to declare that U-boat warfare would be conducted within the strictest limitations of international law and that Germany would not be the first to violate agreed regulations. Thus when the British liner *Athenia* was sunk without warning Raeder asserted that no German U-boat had been present and that the *Athenia* was sunk on the special orders of the First Lord of the British Admiralty, Winston Churchill. To men unfamiliar with German methods, Raeder seemed mad, but the explanation of such eccentricity was probably that no propaganda goes unheeded everywhere, and that something always sticks, especially at home. But even Nazi opinion may have found it unconvincing, for soon Raeder thought of a better story with which to prepare his public for unlimited U-boat warfare.

At the beginning of October 1939 he officially informed the naval attaché of the United States of America in Berlin that the American liner *Iroquois* (6,209 tons) with 566 American passengers, including many children, would be sunk. Raeder said that his Intelligence Department had received information that the *Iroquois* would be sunk by the same agencies that were responsible for the loss of the *Athenia*. Ultimately the ship reached New York harbour after it had been provided with a strong escort by United States naval forces. Raeder then claimed that his warning had forced the First Lord of the Admiralty to abstain from his criminal intention. No doubt the German U-boat commander detailed to back up Raeder's story by attacks did not dare face the risk of encountering the strong U.S. naval patrol.

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After that Raeder dropped every pretence, and his U-boats preyed where and how they could. In broader naval policy, however, he still maintained that a suitable balance between surface craft and U-boat construction required a large increase of surface craft, and the expedition against Norway provided him with easy proof. When a German submarine sank the British battleship *Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow, Raeder's theory of big ships seemed to be shaken at least, but he maintained his position. The critics, conspicuous among them Admiral Doenitz, insisted that with a large surface fleet there would be a repetition of the inactivity of the German fleet during most of the last war.

With the sinking of the *Graf Spee* at the mouth of the River Plate, Raeder was hard hit. Captain Langsdorff, who committed suicide, was a personal friend of his. But even the wild orders which came directly from Hitler at Berchtesgaden and forced Langsdorff to his desperate fate, did not goad Raeder into action. Yet no officer in high command was ever more affronted by dictatorial interference with his rights.

(1) Hitler should not have given any operational orders over the head of Raeder; and

(2) The suicide of Langsdorff might have caused grave unrest in the German Navy.

Yet Raeder is not known to have uttered a word of criticism; and he remained Commander-in-Chief of the Navy.

The general trend of the war worked against him, as against Germany. Setbacks on the battlefield that were conspicuous in themselves began to threaten Nazi plans in face of a slowing down of production. The German industrial war machine had been geared to produce material for certain forms of war. For example, the Afrika Korps equipment needed not only a war factories' production capacity reckoned merely on its strength of 300,000 men, but far more, probably three times that amount. Because the specialised equipment could only be used in North Africa it engaged a disproportionate amount of Germany's production capacity. When Africa fell to the Allies this specialisation in the factories became useless, and the industrial effort absorbed by it had to be switched over to the production of material for war on the European continent. It was a crushing set-back.

Further delay followed the enforced evacuation of the Ruhr

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and the Rhineland after R.A.F. raids. Factories were paralysed for as long as six months. The railways frequently proved to be the bottleneck; trucks loaded with important machinery for a war factory might have to shunt about in Germany for months, stopping completion of a factory in Moravia or Austria. Then the Luftwaffe had made serious miscalculations. Hitler, with growing confidence in his dream that Rommel would be able to link with the Japanese somewhere in India, interfered directly with the production schemes of the German plane industry and ordered a greater proportion of transport planes to be built. After the fighting in Tunisia was over a specialised industrial effort again lost its purpose.

Surprising as it may seem at first sight, all these miscalculations piled up as an embarrassment for Raeder. Critics blamed him for draining man-power, raw material, and facilities of production in keeping up and even extending a surface fleet, which though small, was costly out of proportion to its use in the war. Why had he not concentrated on submarines? What had his surface fleet to show in progress towards victory? How far did the German surface fleet influence British naval operations in the North Sea and in the North Atlantic?

Doenitz, the insatiable submarine chief, calculated that if the man-power employed in the paralysed surface fleet and in its wharf and dock facilities was transferred to submarine construction, he could triple the submarine strength of 1941. In his addresses to crews of returning submarines on the Atlantic coast he inveighed openly against the wasteful policy of the Commander-in-Chief. Doenitz's machinations went further. A rather crestfallen Führer, conscious of having himself committed the main blunders of the war, was glad to find a scapegoat by dismissing one of the chiefs of his armed forces. At least Doenitz promised plenty of action, and whether such action would be successful and influence the general strategy of the war was of less interest, so long as the attention of the German people was diverted from the reverses and strategic withdrawals of the army. Even the smallest news item from the navy would have the stimulus of change, and would be welcomed by more than one Government department as a relief in the theme of its propaganda.

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But perhaps the decisive stroke against Raeder was delivered by Himmler, who had more confidence in his friend Doenitz than in the one time 'Democrat' Admiral. Though Raeder had made frantic efforts to contact Himmler and to become one of his inner circle (like von Ribbentrop and Keitel) he had failed because Himmler did not trust him. And against Himmler even the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy was powerless in the year 1943.





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